The Wagnerian Novel: Iterations of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in Prose

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation traces Richard Wagner's influence on the twentieth century Western European novel. Through a close reading of three monumental works: Gabriele d'Annunzio's *Il fuoco* (1900), Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927), and Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus: The story of the German composer Adrian Leverkühn, as told by a friend* (1947), I argue that Wagner's artistic and theoretical legacy helps set the course for modernist prose. By investigating the vast webs of intertextual references present in these works, this project examines how novelists manipulate multimedia collage, autobiographical incursion, and narrative silence to replicate the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* or "Total Work of Art" both championed by Richard Wagner in his early theoretical manifesti and deployed, in evolving ways, throughout the composer's life. I argue that, rather than creating simple allusions to the Wagnerian ideal across media, d'Annunzio, Proust, and Mann strive to reproduce the full spectrum of Wagner's biographical and operatic spectacle within the confines of the printed page. In so doing, they pioneer revolutionary prose techniques that bring Wagner's innovations to an audience far beyond the walls of the opera house.

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To Mike and Rafa, *l'amor che move il sole e le altre stelle*.

For Mike and Rafa

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Introduction
Vorspiel auf dem Theater

> I want to speak about bodies changed into new
> forms. You, gods, since you are the ones who
> alter these,
> and all other things, inspire my attempt, and spin
> out a continuous thread of words,
> from the world's first origins to my own time.
> -Ovid,
> *Metamorphoses*[1]

This is a project about transformation. In his opening account of the origins of the earth in *Metamorphoses,* Publius Ovidius Naso stages the formation of the material world by an unnamed deity. Creation happens not through the generation of new matter, but through the separation and organization of matter that is already present. Like the God of Genesis, who divides the elements of creation with a series of spoken commands, Ovid's ambiguous godhead ushers new life into the world by disentangling the entwined elements:[2]

> …all of nature's face was featureless—what men call chaos: an undigested mass of crude, confused and scumbled elements, a heap of seeds that clashed, of things mismatched. [...] A god—and nature, now become benign—ended this strife. He separated sky and earth, and earth and waves, and he defined pure air and thicker air. Unraveling these things from their blind heap, assigning each its place—distinct—he linked them all in peace.[3]

From a mass come a multitude.

Richard Wagner was not a god, and his self-appointed task was not to form a new world out of the void, but to blaze a new trail in musical drama. He framed his world-altering creative

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[1] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 5.

[2] *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Genesis, 1.1-2.4.

[3] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 5.

process in direct opposition to the gods of Genesis and Ovid: rather than dividing the elements into their component parts, he preached transformation via a process of artistic amalgamation. The culmination of this process of accretion would be a spectacle of sound, sight, and language. Wagner articulated and performed this process not only in his theoretical and theatrical works, but in every other avenue of his life, including his correspondence, his theatrical festival in Bayreuth, and his personal affairs. The sum total of his efforts would inspire generations of audiences, artists, thinkers, and politicians.

Nonetheless, in the beginning was the Word.[4] Though Wagner was a relentless champion of works that incorporated a variety of media, his own compositional practices began exclusively with text: a four-step libretto composition process.[5] He launched the creation of each theatrical work first with a brief prose sketch, then a longer prose draft, a verse draft, and finally, a fair copy of the libretto as a whole. Only then would Wagner make his first attempts at creating musical line and orchestration.[6] Words are the cornerstones that frame Wagner's multimedia productions. This dissertation asks whether it might be possible to reverse the direction of Wagner's creative process—can multimedia spectacle be transposed or compressed into unadorned words? Is it possible to recreate the full dimensions of Wagnerian spectacle using the printed page as stage? Wagner's skills spanned an unusually broad range of arenas: music composition, narrative development, stage movement, patronage acquisition. Could his admirers

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[4] *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, John, 1.1.

[5] Unlike the majority of opera composers, Wagner wrote his own libretti.

[6] Millington, "Autograph Manuscripts," *The Wagner Compendium*, 196. Millington also notes that Wagner sometimes sketched musical ideas in the margins of his libretti drafts, but as the timing of the musical sketches is uncertain, it is likely that he completed the words for his operas before moving on to the music. (Millington, "Autograph Manuscripts," 204.)

whose gifts were of a more focused scope still contribute to the idealized and unified artistic future he envisioned? This dissertation seeks an answer to this question through a focus on one unusual format: the novel. Through a close intertextual analysis of three characteristic twentieth century texts, Gabriele d'Annunzio's *Il fuoco* (1900), Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927), and Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus: The story of the German composer Adrian Leverkühn, as told by a friend* (1947), I argue that the vastness of Wagner's life and works inspired authors to chart new territory in their prose. In emulating his example, these writers created new techniques and practices that would transform the twentieth century novel. Perhaps there is nothing surprising about this—if the word can launch Creation, surely it can transpose Wagner.

Stagecraft as medium

Wagner was not the first German polymath to celebrate the power of the theater. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is perhaps best known as novelist, playwright, and poet, but he was also the director of the Court Theatre in Weimar from 1791 to 1817. In the opening of one of his most influential works, *Faust: Eine Tragödie*, first published in 1808, Goethe firmly underscores the power of multimedia spectacle.[7] After a brief dedication, Goethe's drama opens on a stage within a stage. In the scene he titles "Prelude in the theater," a conversation unfolds between the Theater Manager, a Poet, and a Comic Actor. As the three characters discuss the nuances of the art and business of theater, they dwell in particular on the needs of an often-distracted audience: "half vulgar and loud, half unmoved and sour, / one's mind on his card game after the play, / another's

[7] Williams, "The Weimar Court Theatre," *Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance Online.*

on tumbling a girl in the hay." [8] The Poet takes particular offense at the assertion that he should modulate his artistic practices in an attempt to please the public, "that crazy crowd," "that shoving, shouting horde." [9] But the scene ends with the Manager emphasizing the value of crowd-pleasing tactics, not only in pursuit of plentiful audiences, "droves of people, a great host, / Trying with all their might to squeeze / Through the strait gate to our paradise," but in service of creation itself, of offering spectators something "lively and new," a fresh experience both of their own world and the unseen worlds beyond its borders.[10] The first scene of the play concludes with the Manager's rousing sendoff:

> You know how on our German stage
> We're free to try whatever we please,
> So don't imagine I want you to save
> Me money on paint and properties.
> Hang out heaven's big and little lamps,
> Scatter stars over the canvas sky,
> Let's have fire and flood and dizzying steeps,
> All sorts of birds and beasts—do the thing liberally.
> And thus on a narrow platform you're able
> To go all the way round Creation's great circle
> At a brisk enough pace, yet deliberately as well,
> From Heaven, through this our world, down to Hell.[11]

It is of crucial importance that the scene immediately following this—the "Prologue in Heaven," a conversation between archangels, the Lord, and Mephistopheles—occurs not as the exterior frame to the world of the stage, but as dramatic action that unfolds under the proscenium arch. The action of the first part of the play will indeed traverse "Heaven, through this our world,

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[8] Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, 7 (lines 124-126).

[9] Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, 5 (lines 60, 62).

[10] Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, 4 (lines 47, 50-53).

[11] Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, 10 (lines 237-248).

down to Hell." Goethe doesn't stop there. In the play's sequel, *Faust: Part Two* (published in 1832, the year of Goethe's death), the characters will move back up into the world and beyond, into the celestial realms. All the material and immaterial dimensions of these journeys are represented upon Goethe's stage.

None of the symbolic resonance of this content was lost on Wagner. A voracious reader from childhood on, Wagner was a fervent, lifelong fan of Goethe's work. One of his earliest compositions, *Leubald*, a play written when he was only thirteen, was based on Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*, and many of his later works resonate with themes from the elder poet's works, particularly the two parts of *Faust.*[12] In 1840, Wagner wrote a concert piece based on the drama, *Eine Faust-Ouvertüre,* which he finally revised it for publication in the 1850s as he corresponded with his future father-in-law Franz Liszt about his own *Faust Symphony.*[13] [14] Wagner's convictions regarding *Faust* only grew as he gained experience as an author for the theater. In his 1872 essay *Actors and Singers*, he wrote passionately of the necessity for particular staging conditions to mount *Faust* properly. In so doing, he drew an explicit parallel between Goethe's works and his own: by that time, a custom-designed theater in Bayreuth, Germany was being

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[12] Borchmeyer, "Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von," *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, 164.

[13] Grey, "*Faust-Ouvertüre, Eine,*" *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, 120.

[14] Even the scathing reviews of Wagner's *Faust-Ouvertüre* suggest that he had no small measure of success in his intuitive rendering of *Faust*'s subject matter. One offers that the work, "begins with a snoring from a bass tuba in the agony of a nightmare." (*Home Journal*, Boston. November 1, 1890, quoted in Slonimsky, *Lexicon of Musical Invective,* 247.) Another suggests that it "may possibly do for the illustration of lunacy or chaos, or fifty other unpleasant things; but it is deficient in almost all of the qualities which belong to really good music." (*Sporting News*, London, October 17, 1874, quoted in Slonimsky, *Lexicon of Musical Invective,* 239.) Even these derogatory assessments open up interesting possibilities in interpreting Wagner's musical adaptation of the full scope of Goethe's drama.

built to the precise specifications of Wagner's works for the stage.[15] In Wagner's estimation, revolutionary works needed a similarly revolutionary space in which to delight and transform audiences. Though Wagner's tastes in literature shifted throughout his life, *Faust* remained a constant presence even on the skeletal list of essential reading that he maintained in his later years.[16] The Manager of Goethe's *Faust*, with his exhortations regarding the use of the full brunt of theatrical technology to represent the scope of human experience, offers a helpful gateway into the examination of Wagner's artistic practices.

Wagnerian iteration in the novel

This dissertation takes a broad approach to examining the Wagnerian legacy, reading not only his works for the stage, but the aggregate of Wagner's life activities as his stagecraft. I argue that, encouraged by Wagner's early theoretical writings, the authors who follow Wagner tend to amalgamate his creations and his life into a single entity. It is this composite figure, not any single work, that is the primogenitor for what I call the Wagnerian novel. All of the novels I treat signal their debt to Wagner with a variety of embedded references to his works and life. Equally importantly, however, they mirror the spectrum of his compositional practices: all of them blend artistic, theoretical, and autobiographical material seamlessly into their narratives.

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[15] Interestingly, though I alluded to the staging of *Faust* scenes within the proscenium arch, Wagner advocated omitting the proscenium altogether in performances of *Faust*—proposing instead that the drama should unfold in a theater in which the stage would be completely surrounded by spectators. (Borchmeyer, "Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von," *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, 165.) Wagner's specifications for his own theater in Bayreuth, which opened to the public in 1876, are quite different.

[16] Borchmeyer, "Reading," *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, 460.

This project approaches the analysis of the Wagnerian legacy as a genealogical study. In the remainder of this introduction, "*Vorspiel auf dem Theater*," I will delineate the parameters of what I have termed the Wagnerian novel, assessing how Wagner's influence frames how we interact with modernist prose and what we consider "modern" as a whole. I will note, in particular, previous critical engagement with Wagner's literary legacy, and I will set forth how this project stands distinct from that history. In chapter one, "The Wagnerian Novel: Birth of a genre," I will chronicle the elements of Wagner's life and works that are most fruitful for the novels that transpose his legacy into text: his presentation of himself as artist, his manipulation of the mediating bodies of performers, his techniques to engage his audiences in new ways, his particular innovations within music. In the subsequent chapters, I will chart the legacy of these particular dynamics through close readings of individual novels and their intertextual references, both with Wagner and beyond. Chapter two, "Gabriele d'Annunzio's *Il fuoco:* Notes toward a *Gesamtkunstroman,*" explores the ways in which d'Annunzio's narrative offers an early template for a composite Wagnerian novel. In chapter three, "Marcel Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu:* Book as Bayreuth," I will continue to trace this lineage sequentially. Chapter four, "Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus:* Transformation and its discontents" will track the transmedial literary techniques Mann adopts both from Wagner himself and from d'Annunzio and Proust as he crafts his narrative. In the conclusion, "Time becomes space," I will first take a look back into a common medieval source for all of the artists I have treated: Dante Alighieri, assessing the ways in which Wagner's contributions, and those of d'Annunzio, Proust, and Mann, build upon Dante's legacy. Finally, I will suggest that Wagner, and the novels who follow him, employ multimedia references to transform not only their audience's artistic experiences, but their

experience of sensory material outside the theater and the page. In so doing, I will argue that the cultivation of synesthetic techniques in literature after Wagner helps set the course for modernist prose.

First, however, I must define "modernist prose," an endeavor that presents some challenges. Though theorists agree that there is newness involved in this category (otherwise, why bother naming it?), the precise site of that newness is a subject of some debate. In "Accounting for History: Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus,*" Ritchie Robertson argues that "Modernism is an art of fragmentation."[17] My framework for this project means I will argue precisely the opposite: that modernism is an art of amalgamation. Jed Rasula, in *History of a Shiver: The Sublime Impudence of Modernism,* takes a similar tack to mine, invoking both synesthesia and compression in his elaboration of Wagner's relation to modernism. Drawing upon the work of Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Rasula asserts that:

> the preparatory moods emanating from Wagnerism (the first *ism* and launching pad of the modern as *ism*) […] agitated a craving for—-and thereby nurtured the receptivity to —these crossed wires [of disarranged semantic contexts]. The pursuit of synesthesia in the nineteenth century gradually shed its various theosophical and other period associations until, by '1910,' it was understood in the simple exhortation to *make it new*, whatever it was.[18]

I find this description helpful in framing my own method: I will argue that through an act of theatrical imitation—compressing the composite of Wagner's works, life and practices into novel form—the authors I treat achieve something new, a synesthetic "total novel."

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[17] Robertson, "Accounting for History: Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus*," *The German Novel in the Twentieth Century*, 128.

[18] Rasula, *History of a Shiver*, 19, 11.

In his definition of modern fiction in "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy," David Lodge does not refer directly to Wagner (though he does use the term "*leitmotif,*" which is frequently associated with Wagner), but his definition aligns substantially with the categories I will outline:

> Let me suggest that modern fiction […] is fiction displaying some or all of the following features. First, it is experimental or innovatory in form, exhibiting market deviations from existing modes of discourse, literary and non-literary. Next, it is much concerned with consciousness and also with the subconscious or unconscious workings of the human mind. Hence the structure of external 'objective' events essential to narrative art in traditional poetics is diminished in scope and scale, or presented selectively and obliquely, in order to make room for introspection, analysis, reflection and reverie. […] By way of compensation for the weakening of narrative structure and unity, other modes of aesthetic ordering become more prominent—such as allusion to or imitation of literary models, or mythical archetypes; or repetition-with-variation of motifs, images, symbols, a technique often called 'rhythm', '*leitmotif*', or 'spatial form'. Lastly, modern fiction eschews the straight chronological ordering of its material, and the use of a reliable, omniscient and intrusive narrator.[19]

Through close readings of *Il fuoco*, the *Recherche*, and *Doctor Faustus,* this dissertation will establish a parallel set of symptoms for diagnosing the Wagnerian novel.[20] I will elaborate the dimensions of these categories in greater detail in the first chapter, but in the most most concise terms, the novels in this project share the following traits:

1. They make frequent reference to Wagner's works for the stage, his treatises on musical drama, and his legacy at the Bayreuth Festival.
2. They feature an encyclopedic range of concrete references to existing works of art, literature, music, and theater beyond those of Wagner. (Quantity is essential here: in these works, references run into the thousands, even for the shortest text, *Il fuoco.*)
3. They all incorporate fictional music that plays a pivotal role in the narrative.
4. They all chronicle the evolution of an artist protagonist.

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[19] Lodge, "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy," *Modernism 1890-1930*, 481.

[20] With the obligatory nod to Friedrich Nietzsche, Wagner's most vociferous diagnostician.

5. They all assign autobiographical material clearly recognizable as pertaining to their authors to their protagonists, conflating the presentation of author and subject.

At first glance, these categories might seem to diverge from those of Lodge—they are a good deal more specific than his. However, using Lodge's general definition as an example, I suggest that the Wagnerian novel is a particular genre of modernist novel; it uses Wagner and his work not only as content but as structuring principle. In these novels, the experimentation Lodge details is displayed in the rigorous accumulation of sensory references in service of the united aesthetic effect championed by Wagner. The concern with consciousness is supplied by the performative conflation of author and protagonist; the aesthetic reordering is provided, once again, by the vast series of aesthetic references, which often function as individual *leitmotifs.*[21] Finally, though the style of narration differs in each of the texts I treat—*Il Fuoco* uses an omniscient, unnamed narrator, the *Recherche* uses a first-person narrator who is the protagonist, and *Doctor Faustu*s uses a first-person narrator who is not the primary protagonist—the conscientious blending of authorial autobiography and subject matter complicates the presentation of reality. The three novels I will explore are innovative and immensely influential for the authors of their time and beyond. Because of their unique features and their broad readership, I argue that these novels were all so vital to the evolution of twentieth century prose and so closely aligned with Wagner that the composer's direct influence can be seen in numerous authors and artists who never engaged with his works firsthand. I argue, in closing, that Wagner helps set the stage not only for modernist prose, but for twenty-first century culture at large.

[21] This project will generally use "motif" rather than "*leitmotif.*" Here, I follow Lodge's phrasing.

Wagner: Beyond friend or foe

Though this dissertation explores relatively uncharted critical ground, there is a time-honored tradition of crediting Wagner with the advent of modernity. In 1888, in *The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem*, Friedrich Nietzsche establishes Richard Wagner as the figure of central importance in contending with the modern:

> Through Wagner modernity speaks most intimately, concealing neither its good nor its evil—having forgotten all sense of shame. And conversely: one has almost completed an account of that value of what is modern once one has gained clarity about what is good and evil in Wagner.
>
> I understand perfectly when a musician says today: "I hate Wagner, but I can no longer endure any other music." But I'd also understand a philosopher who would declare: "Wagner sums up modernity. There is no way out, one must first become a Wagnerian." [22]

Nietzsche's emphasis on this essay is both on the sickness of Wagner himself and the sickness imparted upon his audiences by him. What does this have to do with modernity? Nietzsche concludes the second postscript to the essay by asserting that, in modernity, "falsehood itself has become flesh and blood," that Wagner is the "Cagliostro of modernity" — that a diagnosis of the modern soul would center upon falseness and anti-aestheticism.[23] Both throughout his life and after his death, Wagner has reliably aroused strong responses, both positive and negative. Nietzsche himself was a friend and ardent fan before becoming disillusioned with the composer; it is especially interesting that even his negative judgments focus on Wagner's power and influence. Even if, as Nietzsche asserts, Wagner's power is only that of a notorious quack like Cagliostro, he is nonetheless a powerful force, one who might infect his audience rather than

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[22] Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (Kaufmann translation), 156.

[23] Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (Kaufmann translation), 192.

elevate them. In his framing of Wagner's corrosive influence, however, Nietzsche still takes a page from Wagner's compulsively repetitive style: the first postscript of *The Case of Wagner* contains five paragraphs that open with the sentence, "One pays heavily for being one of Wagner's disciples."[24] This cultish, performative obsession regarding Wagner, demonstrated in microcosm in Nietzsche's prose, is a sentiment that is echoed elsewhere again and again.[25] Why is Wagner the source for such virulent enthusiasm and hatred?

I do not share Nietzsche's convictions regarding the danger Wagner poses for malleable youths, women, or any would-be fans. However, like him, I will argue that Wagner is a generative force for what we consider modernity. From the vantage point of 2017, I argue that Wagner's greatest influence on culture at large and the novel in particular lies in his modeling of amalgamation as a theoretical, artistic, and life practice. Amidst the flurry of conferences and celebrations leading up to the bicentennial of Wagner's birth in 2013, a range of compelling studies have emerged that explore the Wagnerian legacy in the 20th and 21st centuries.[26] A great number of these works emphasize the legacy of Wagner's valorization of a multimedia art form that would reign superior over all other forms. In *The Quest for the Gesamtkunstwerk and Richard Wagner*, Hilda Brown argues that "The source of [Wagner's] uniqueness lies […] in

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[24] Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (Kaufmann translation), 181-185.

[25] The poet Umberto Saba gets right to the heart of this single-mindedness in his *Scorciatoie e raccontini.* Shortcut number 28, "WAGNER," reads only, "I Wagneriani erano sospetti, non perché amavano Wagner, ma perché amavano solo Wagner." (Saba, *Scorciatoie e raccontini*, 35.)

[26] See in particular: Brown, *The Quest for the Gesamtkunstwerk and Richard Wagner;* Koss, *Modernism after Wagner*; Mirabile, *Multimedia Archaeologies: Gabriele D'Annunzio, Belle Époque Paris, and the Total Artwork*; Quinn, *Richard Wagner: The Lighter Side*; Rasula, *History of a Shiver;* Ridley, *Wagner and the Novel: Wagner's Operas and the European Realist Novel*; Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism;* Smith, *The Total Work of Art From Bayreuth to Cyberspace*; and Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand.* From the parallel cluster of studies published near the centennial of Wagner's birth in 1983, particularly relevant are: DiGaetani, *Wagner and the Modern British Novel;* Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, and Large and Weber, *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics.*

Wagner's spectacular success in articulating a lofty vision by means of fusion or synthesis of two major art forms, drama and music. The distinctive term of this has come, by devious routes, and not entirely as Wagner himself intended, to be *Gesamtkunstwerk.*"

Gesamtkunstwerk can be translated literally as both "total work of art" and "combined work of art." [27] It is a term associated particularly with Wagner, though it was not coined by him: it was first used in print by the philosopher Karl Trahndorff in 1827 to represent an art that strove toward the combination of four arts: the sound of words, music, facial expression, and dance.[28] While the word *Gesamtkunstwerk* might have been new, the concept was not—a number of artists and theorists, including the dramatist Friedrich Schiller and the composer Carl Maria von Webern, had expressed similar ideas in the preceding decades.[29] Wagner used the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* only occasionally—though he frequently ennobled the revolutionary nature of his works by avoiding calling them by previously established names, he invented other terms to refer to his works for the stage.[30] Nonetheless, "*Gesamtkunstwerk*" has come, for many, to represent the Wagnerian legacy. Brown argues for an especially broad understanding of the term, expanding it to include the experience of attending the festival Wagner created to present his own works in Bayreuth. She even suggests that associations with the theater he built there, "including

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[27] Brown notes that a complexity in its translation lies in the fact that "a salient feature of the term *gesamt* lies not in the notion of a *plurality* of art forms, but rather *a completeness of the process of integration or fusion of two or more major forms.*" (Brown, *The Quest for the Gesamtkunstwerk and Richard Wagner*, 1.) It is also worth noting that the German term is imported into English wholesale with relative frequency, not always accurately. It is sometimes used off-label to represent works that are particularly ambitious, multi-sensory, or even, occasionally, simply very long.

[28] Koss, "*Gesamtkunstwerk*," *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia,* 158.

[29] I will argue in the next chapter that the idea of total, synesthetic art has been implicit in opera since the form's inception in seventeenth century Tuscany. D'Annunzio will make the same argument in *Il fuoco*.

[30] Wagner famously titled his final completed drama, *Parsifal*, a "*Bühnenweihfestspiel*" (a "stage consecration festival play") in the score. *Parsifal* was completed in 1882 specifically for Wagner's festival at Bayreuth, with the precise qualities of its custom-designed theater in mind. (Kinderman, "*Bühnenweihfestspiel,*" *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, 72.)

both the building and its architecture, therefore, are also wrapped up in the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*." [31] I would like to go still further. In his reckoning with his forefather, "On the need to Debate Richard Wagner in an open society: How to confront Wagner," director, publicist, and researcher Gottfried Wagner, the great-grandson of Richard, notes that:

> Wagner intended the artistic integration of all his experiences, experiences both lived and acquired by voracious reading, which included every facet of the humanities and natural sciences. […] Wagner, creator of the greatest imaginable melting pot of disciplines and artistic media, transformed others' material into a monologue that he presented to the world as his own creation. Although he was the most grandiose self-promoter in history, he favored himself as a democrat. In letters and published writings, Wagner used the first person plural when driving home an opinion, self-consciously adopting the royal "we" to refer to Richard Wagner as poet, composer, stage director, theatrical entrepreneur, historian, philosopher, theologian, politician, medical doctor, and natural scientist, among other identities.[32]

The existence of these multitudes in a single man is precisely at the heart of this project. In *"*Lingering dissonances in Wagner Scholarship," Matthew Bribitzer-Stull notes that a central concern for twenty-first century readers is "the relationship between Wagner the artist and Wagner the social phenomenon."[33] I will argue that Wagner the social phenomenon is inextricable from Wagner the artist because staging himself as a social phenomenon was one of Wagner's greatest artistic achievements.

In this dissertation, I take the position that it is not simply that Wagner employed his convictions in transcendent amalgamation within his theatrical compositions that enabled him to make such an impact. Instead, I argue that Wagner's articulation and popularization of the

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[31] Brown, *The Quest for the Gesamtkunstwerk and Richard Wagner,* 11.

[32] G. Wagner, "On the need to Debate Richard Wagner in an open society: How to confront Wagner," *Wagner for the New Millennium,* 5-6.

[33] Bribitzer-Stull, "Lingering dissonances in Wagner Scholarship," *Wagner for the New Millennium,* xiv.

importance of artistic amalgamation in his early theoretical works, principally *The Art-Work of the Future* (1849) and *Opera and Drama* (1851) drove the reception of his compositions.[34] For Wagner, the preaching was as important as the practice. Most importantly, the doctrine of amalgamation, though framed by Wagner explicitly in terms of theatrical practice, also serves in broader terms to illuminate how some artists that followed him unified not only his theories and his compositions, but also his life itself, into a cohesive artistic process.

In this project, I will use the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a point of entry into examining the influence of Wagner on three twentieth century novels from three different nations and cultural traditions. These represent the three national traditions most prominent in operatic history: the Italian (*Il fuoco*), the French (*À la recherche du temps perdu*), and the German (*Doctor Faustus*). Even today, the production of opera requires collaboration and fluency across a wide range of borders: artistic, linguistic, and national. These three novels, existing on the borderlands between both media and culture, replicate that general dynamic. They also iterate the specifics of Wagner's contributions to theory and practice. In this study, I read the legacy of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as the process of amalgamation of source materials, drawn from a variety of media, toward a unified artistic objective. In the case of prose transformations of Wagner, this amalgamation includes not only the composer's complete artistic and theoretical works, but all of

[34] This applies even to those works that he composed much later in his life, while he was guided by a different set of artistic preoccupations.Wagner's theoretical convictions and compositional practices shifted over the decades: he eventually moved away from artistic fusion and toward music itself as the driving force for drama. Nonetheless, his early theoretical writings, dating largely from the time he spent in Zürich from 1849-1858, have remained an important filter through which audiences experience his works. This is true even for works that he composed at the end of his life, such as *Parsifal* (1882). For the audiences encountering Wagner's legacy, an understanding of the composer's philosophy is often compressed into a snapshot view of his beliefs in certain eras, rather than a longitudinal panorama of his evolving convictions. Though interpreting *Parsifal* through the lens of Wagner's writings in *The Art-Work of the Future* (1849) offers a distorted view of the composer's shifting practices across his life, that is nonetheless precisely what many of those who use his works as source material do.

the works that encircled his life—autobiographies, myths, scandals, the diaries of his wife, Cosima, caricatures, the Bayreuth Festival. The novels I explore combine Wagner's works and biographical data into a single, monumental work, and then reproduce that work in prose form, creating a novel that unifies artistic ambition, theoretical exegesis, and autobiographical detail.

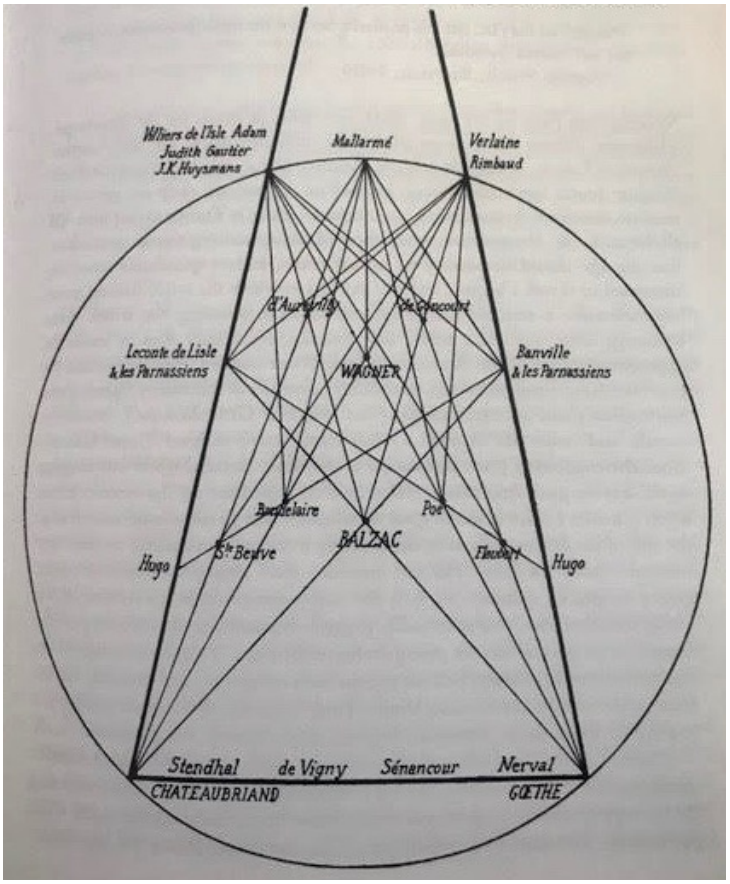
The novel interests me as a target medium for Wagnerian transposition largely because it seems an improbable destination for a multimedia artwork. Of its alignment with music, dance, and poetry, Wagner's three elemental arts, or "primitive sisters," written prose offers no innate sound or physical movement; even the rhythms associated with poetry are often muted in the steady flow of a novel's text. However, the novels I will treat nonetheless transpose Wagner into narrative prose with great innovation, successfully incorporating practices drawn not only from Wagner's stage dramas and theoretical manifesti, but also his performance as a public figure. By replicating The Total Wagner in the most unlikely of places, these novelists cast light on dynamics of performance and reception that often remain hidden.

Wagner and literature

Though examinations of Wagner and literature are legion, my use of the designation "Wagnerian novel" in titling this project is intentionally perverse. The form of theater Wagner championed was an explicitly multimedia spectacle: in his conception, a novel could not occupy that taxonomic space. Wagner made an aggressive case for prose's subordinate position in the hierarchy of arts in his description of the evolution of written storytelling in *The Art-Work of the Future*:

> The wintry stem of Speech, stripped of its summer wreath of sounding leaves, shrank to the wintered toneless signs of *Writing:* instead of to the Ear, it dumbly now addressed the *Eye;* the poet's strain became a *written dialect,*--the poet's breath the *penman's scrawl* […] This whole impassable waste of stored-up literature--despite its million phrases and centuries of verse and prose, without once coming to the living Word—is nothing but the toilsome stammering of aphasia-smitten Thought, in its struggle for transmutation into natural articulate utterance.[35]

However, despite this broad dismissal, the extensive records of Wagner's reading practices and libraries attest to his lifelong engagement with prose. He was a vigorous, if not always precise, reader. Wagner published volumes upon volumes of his own toilsome stammering of aphasia-smitten thought: the most expansive current catalog of his published works runs to 301 entries.[36] His vast publication record attests to the fact that he found some potential value in prose (and that he had no qualms about contradicting himself over time). Novelists have also found much potential value in Wagner.



Charles Morice's *Diagram of Wagner and literary influence*, from *Littérature de tout à l'heure* (1889), depicts the composer at the center of a complex web of relationships that unite the literary giants of nineteenth century France.

[35] Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future,* 137-138.

[36] Nattiez, *Wagner androgyne*, 303-308. Some of the works on this list are of disputed authenticity—the list in *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia* has just 248. (Vazsonyi, *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia,* 772-805.)

Wagnerian concordances

Many of the existing studies that explore Wagner and the novel fit within one of two dominant modes of exploration:

1. The historical/narrative concordance, which seeks out points of data alignment between prose narrative and the details of Wagner's life or works. These examinations frequently delve into the mythic or symbolic resonance of Wagner's characters.
2. Metaphorical studies that explore the adaptation of Wagner's dramatic and musical composition practices into the composition of prose.

Raymond Furness' *Wagner and literature* gives a particularly robust accounting of Wagner's influence on European and American literature, from symbolism through nineteen-seventies satire ("a rich source of humour may be found in those writers who delight in debunking excessive Wagnerolatry").[37] However, despite Furness' assertion that the "construction of fiction with a totality derived from the use of Wagnerian techniques" is more compelling than the "peripheral interest" of a catalogue of references, the vast scope of Furness' examination necessarily means that the individual entries function primarily as signposts of Wagnerian content rather than in-depth explorations of each work.[38] Nonetheless, *Wagner and literature* and studies like it are vital in establishing the breadth of Wagner's influence on literary works, from poetry and prose through theater.[39]

All the texts I will treat in this dissertation broadcast their Wagnerian heritage through features of their plot, narrative, and character development, and all of these details signal

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[37] Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, xi.

[38] Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, xi.

[39] Of particular interest, though somewhat outside the scope of this particular project, are: DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel;* Martin, *Joyce and Wagner: A Study of Influence;* and Ridley, *Wagner and the Novel: Wagner's Operas and the European Realist Novel, An Exploration of Genre.*

important artistic allegiances. Wagner's valorization of myth in both theory and practice also encouraged authors who admired him to follow his lead, employing a wide spectrum of cultural traditions, drawn from history and myth, as narrative shorthand.[40] While all of the novels I treat deal with contemporary subjects, they all harness the structure, style, and content of classical and medieval narrative in their exposition. However, one limitation in examinations of narrative appropriation from Wagner's operas is the fact that Wagner's operas are not especially renowned for their narrative action. Storytelling is a device used extensively in Wagner's works, but it often functions to forestall action rather than generate it— characters rehash old contracts, old familial conflicts, and old histories of men and mortals while the action around them grinds to a halt. Ostensible cultural familiarity notwithstanding, the mythic backstories of Wagner's epic works do sometimes require some narrative handholding. However, the "previously, on *Der Ring des Nibelungen*..." sections of the operas tend to escape top billing when the highlight reels are assembled.[41] While I will note instances of Wagnerian narrative transfer in this study, my

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[40] This practice also offers fertile territory for critics who examine resonance between Wagner's works and the works of the past. Mary Cicora does so in no fewer than five illuminating volumes of commentary: *From history to myth: Wagner's Tannhäuser and its literary sources*; *Parsifal reception in the Bayreuther Blätter*; *Mythology as metaphor: romantic irony, critical theory, and Wagner's Ring; Modern myths and Wagnerian deconstructions: hermeneutic approaches to Wagner's music-dramas; Wagner's Ring and German drama: comparative studies in mythology and history in drama.*

[41] In the summer of 2015, as my family drove through Milwaukee, a billboard with an unusual proposition drew me into a production of *The Skylight Ring Cycle*, an abridged, English-language adaptation of Wagner's entire *Der Ring des Nibelungen,* performed with a blazing run time of two hours. Though I arrived in eager anticipation of a total disaster, I was surprised to find that not only was the production clever and interesting, but it managed to feel remarkably complete (indeed, of all the primary musical themes in the full cycle, only the Nibelheim motif was absent). A piano, three singers, and a host of creative props managed to render all fifteen(ish) musical hours of the cycle with a charming, coherent, and yes, precisely two-hour show. By presenting the work in a version that distilled the action to its most vital components, the production also made it abundantly clear just how few events occur in the course of the cycle. ("The Skylight Ring," Skylight Music Theatre.) The company Unexpected Opera mounted a similar production entitled *The Rinse Cycle* in London in 2016, drawing in audiences with the promise that they would "remove the cultural stains and encrusted stereotypes" of the tetralogy along with the extra hours of music. ("The Rinse Cycle," Charing Cross Theatre.)

primary focus is in exploring the ways in which Wagner's multifaceted creative practices can be translated into the medium of the novel.

Wagnerian techniques

Beyond the term *Gesamtkunstwerk,* a perennial favorite for those reckoning with Wagner's legacy in literature (myself included), the term "*leitmotif*" also tends to feature prominently in examinations of Wagnerian practice in literature. The music historian August Wilhelm Ambros coined the term in 1860 to refer to the way in which Wagner used short, repetitive musical phrases, dispersed across time in a work, to increase the unity of the work as a whole. As with the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Wagner rarely used the term himself—he used "*thematisches Motiv*" (thematic motif) or "*Hauptmotiv*" (main motive) to refer to the process Ambros describes. Always eager to set his own theoretical parameters and terms, Wagner was famously dismissive of Ambros' neologism.[42] Literary critics, however, have seized upon it in conceptualizing the echoes of Wagner in literature; countless works of criticism classify repeated linguistic phrases in a prose work as as *leitmotivic*. There is one particular difficulty with this equivocation: letters and words operate in vastly different systems of signification than those of musical notes. Christian Thorau offers a helpful clarification that re-centers the importance of music, not text, in Wagner's practice of motive development:

> the musical *motives* are supposed to transfer the dramatic *motives* of the plot into the nonverbal artistic expression of the music. The semantic referential dimension of the motives, its function of reminiscence and anticipation, should not rise into awareness as a conceptual definiteness but should remain part of the total effect, where that which is

[42] Whittall, "*Leitmotiv*," *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, 246-247.

shown is understood in a holistic, integrated manner.[43]

In this way, it is impossible to sustain an equivalence between language and musical notes; with words, meaning almost always enters into the picture. While I consider repetition and motival development to be essential components of this project, I deliberately avoid the term "*leitmotiv*" because I find that its connotations obscure the nuances of pattern repetition in these texts rather than illuminating them. Instead, I will use "motif" to describe repeating patterns of words, images, themes, and music.

Prose sketch

Wagner published compulsively on the power of multimedia theatrical experience. While a number of his theoretical positions evolved over the course of his long career in the public eye, he was consistent in his valorization of music and performance as the highest forms of human expression. But his life was his greatest performance of all. I follow Nietzsche in arguing that Wagner is crucial for understanding modernity, but I believe he functions less as a symptom of modern decadence than as a Rosetta Stone to modern practices. His massive creative legacy continues to shape the way artists, politicians, and individuals stage manage their own public presentation. In *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations,* Ruth Solie asserts that:

> Popular Wagnerism focused not on the rich diversity resulting from continual speciation, but on the subsumption of outworn forms by better-adapted ones. It looked forward to a state of "perfection" in which latent tendencies would be realized and needs fulfilled, […] [just as] the arts desire to be joined to other arts as they reach perfection, at which point the old form would be overcome and left behind.[44]

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[43] Thorau, "Guides for Wagnerites: Leitmotifs and Wagnerian Listening," *Richard Wagner and His World*, 138.

[44] Solie, *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations,* 166.

It is difficult to imagine modernity without Wagner's contributions. What would popular film be without Darth Vader's Imperial March? Or the darkened movie theater, a beneficiary of Wagner's revolutionary practices at Bayreuth? Or a phone call in an elevator, scored in orchestral depth for Wagner's warrior-maidens, the Valkyries? Modernity has been transformed by Wagner in ways he could never have predicted.

And still, in human history, there is no equivalent of Wagner's Bayreuth Festival, with its theater designed to his precise specifications for the exclusive performance of his own works. D'Annunzio's *Vittoriale degli Italiani* was constructed to rival Bayreuth, and even it falls short. To even attempt the full scope of Wagner's legacy, one would need to combine any number of contemporary icons and their artistic, autobiographical, and architectural legacies: Elvis Presley's *Graceland* is a pilgrimage site, but it is more museum than performance space. Walt Disney's *Disneyland* achieves a different measure of the "self as theme park" dimension that Bayreuth does, but it promotes the legacy of Disney's gigantic workforce and studio more than it does Disney's own contributions. Donald Trump has mastered the fusion self, spectacle, and architecture into a personal brand, acquiring a remarkable amount of political power in the process; his performative racism, classism, and xenophobia even outpace Wagner's. However, Trump is unlikely to contribute anything of artistic merit (his vigorous anti-aestheticism may be his greatest "artistic" legacy). The partnership of Kanye West and Kim Kardashian reflects in many ways the closest current iteration of Wagner's full multimedia legacy: A powerful couple, with two personalities who evoke great emotions in the public, both positive and negative; a musical innovator who arouses passionate dissent as to both the quality of his work and his

character; a "reality" show that documents an exhaustive, but fanatically curated cross-section of the couple's personal lives in the public eye, numerous fashion lines, for tastes to suit any budget, to make oneself over in the image of one's idols (while increasing their wealth in the process); scandalous intimate affairs that fan the flames of their celebrity. But even the Kardashian-Wests, though beneficiaries of the Wagnerian legacy, don't have an equivalent of Bayreuth. Wagner remains, still, singular.

The novels I will explore in this study fit neatly into the prominent modes of criticism on Wagner and literature. All of them incorporate narrative elements drawn from Wagner's operas, all of them refer to Wagner's biography and theoretical works alongside his operas, and all of them feature general multimedia practices often classified under the umbrella of "Wagnerian." What is most essential in this study, however, is not these dynamics. It is the fact that these novels reach beyond these factors, seizing upon the full range of Wagnerian practices in their stylistic development, deploying both autobiographical material and theoretical treatises that have the potential to shape their own legacy. They do so without any technological assists other than the printing press.

As a born innovator, Wagner was an enthusiast for any technology that could render the theatrical experience more potent. One cannot help but wonder what he could have done with the technological miracles of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Critics rightfully acknowledge Wagner's legacy in everything from the immersive elements of new theatrical productions to the quotidian theater of daily lives, in which the composer's own melodies still animate cartoon bunnies and ringtones across the globe. Part of what makes the Wagnerian novel so fascinating is that it attempts the transformative immersion of the Wagnerian spectacle without recourse to any

technology other than the reader's imagination. D'Annunzio, Proust, and Mann didn't film reality shows, or build a theme park, or emblazon giant gold buildings with their names in their Wagnerian quests. They just wrote. In that action lies the power of the Wagnerian novel.

Chapter One
The Wagnerian novel: Birth of a genre

> Of all the bête, clumsy, blundering, boggling, baboon-blooded stuff I ever saw on a human stage, that thing last night (*Meistersinger*) beat—as far as the story and acting went; and of all the affected, sapless, soulless, beginningless, endless, topless, bottomless, topsy-turviest, tongs- and boniest doggerel of sounds I ever endured the deadliness of, that eternity of nothing was the deadliest—as far as sound went.
>
> -John Ruskin,
> *Letter to Mrs, Burne-Jones, June 30, 1882*[1]

Wagner was born into an artistic family in Leipzig in 1813.[2] His early life was characterized by uncertainty: by the time he was seven, both his father and stepfather had died, and the financial instability he experienced as a child would pursue him until his death in 1883. Wagner moved frequently throughout his early years, at times to pursue work, at times to escape his ever-mounting debts. Despite his occasional Marxist leanings, Wagner had an enthusiasm for luxurious living that was never dampened by his lack of funds. By the age of thirty, however, Wagner had entered his first extended period of financial stability: an appointment to the position of *Kapellmeister* in Dresden in 1843 brought with it a seven-year reign of relative comfort and ease. Though his salary in Dresden did not provide Wagner with funds adequate to pay his outstanding debts, it did enable him to live mostly within his means, a first in his life to date. He

[1] Ruskin, "Letter to Mrs. Burne-Jones, dated June 30, 1882," quoted in Slonimsky, *Lexicon of Musical Invective*, 243.

[2] I have compiled Wagner's historical background from the following sources: Watson, "Wagner, (Wilhelm) Richard," in Vazsonyi, *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, 661-676; Millington, "Calendar of Wagner's life, works, and related events," in Millington, *Wagner Compendium,*12-19; and R. Wagner, "Autobiographical Sketch," in Barth, Mack, and Voss, *Wagner: A Documentary Study*, 11-16.

seemed to enjoy some elements of the security the position provided, and took the opportunity to champion works that he admired, particularly the late works of Beethoven.

However, Wagner wanted much more than recognition for his interpretations of other composer's creations. He was ravenous for public acclaim for his own compositions. By the beginning of 1845, Wagner had completed two operas that achieved some measure of critical interest: *Rienzi* and *Der Fliegende Holländer.* His opera *Tannhäuser* premiered in October of 1845, and by 1847, it was the object of significant local enthusiasm. But it was precisely this regional appeal that grated upon Wagner: he was uninterested in being a local darling, and was continually frustrated by his inability to make a name for himself in Paris and Berlin.

Straining against the bonds of what he considered a limited existence, Wagner began to direct increasing attention toward political aims. In the beginning, these aims were explicitly connected to the theater. In 1846, he submitted a report on reorganization of the royal orchestra of Saxony. It was completely ignored. By 1848, his project had grown substantially both in title and scope: when the German National Assembly convened in Frankfurt in May, Wagner submitted his Plan for the Organization of German National Theatre for the Kingdom of Saxony. The grandiose nature of his offering did not aid its reception—it, too, was destined to languish unseen on an administrator's shelf. Increasingly certain that the art form he sought to promote would not be possible without significant political reform, Wagner began to participate more actively in revolutionary meetings in Dresden, working closely with his friend, violinist and agitator August Röckel, and Röckel's associate and houseguest, Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. Wagner published anonymous articles in Röckel's anarchist-leaning newspaper and collaborated actively with Röckel through the first days of the Dresden revolt. The uprising

began on May 3rd. On May 7th, the Dresden opera house burned as insurgents from the countryside arrived to reinforce the barricades, which were now being struck down by both Prussian and Saxon forces. Röckel and Bakunin were taken into custody. Wagner, however, had escaped to his sister's house in Chemnitz, fifty miles away. On May 16th, an official warrant was issued for Wagner's arrest. With the help of Franz Liszt, who was by this point in time and space *Kapellmeister* in Weimar and an ardent supporter of Wagner, Wagner managed to escape the borders of the German federation. He settled in Zürich, which would be his primary home for the next nine years.

The early years of exile were particularly difficult. Tensions between Wagner and his first wife Minna grew steadily: she never forgave him for jeopardizing their comfortable living in Dresden with his revolutionary affiliations, particularly when the alternative was a life of complete insecurity in a nation that was not their own. Though Wagner's accounts of the time, both epistolary and for public consumption, are characterized by the flair for drama and invention that infuses all of his writings, the toll these years in exile took on him can be measured by one very important detail: he stopped composing.

Wagner had begun to compose music as a teenager in the late 1820s, and for decades after, he dedicated himself to the task with frenetic conviction. But his simultaneous professional frustrations and revolutionary activities in the late 1840s had slowed his productivity. Wagner completed the score of *Lohengrin* in April of 1848, and he began work on the score of *Das Rheingold* in 1853. In the interim, instead of writing music, Wagner was writing *about* music. In that time, he published some of his most renowned theoretical meditations on operatic practice.

He clarified his decision to describe the grandiose aims of the "art of the future" rather than compose it in a letter to violinist Theodor Uhlig in 1849:

> My task is to make revolution wherever I go. This new art cannot at the present be created, it can only be prepared for—by provoking revolution, by smashing and destroying everything that deserves to be smashed and destroyed. [3]

Wagner published *The Art-Work of the future* in Leipzig at the end of 1849. It would not be Wagner's last literary work—he would continue to write and publish until the day he died. But it would be one of his most influential works. In his analysis, Wagner first examines the history of Western artistic culture, focusing in particular on ancient Athenian drama and the ritualistic power it exerted over its citizens. In venerating Athenian drama, he frames the conditions of contemporary life as a period of regression from the time in which the three primeval human arts —Dance, Tone, and Poetry—functioned as a single entity. Wagner then sets his specifications for a renewal and evolution of drama:

> Artistic Man can only fully content himself by uniting every branch of Art into the *common* Artwork: in every *segregation* of his artistic faculties he is *unfree*, not fully that which he has power to be, whereas in the *common* Artwork he is *free* and fully that which he has power to be. The *true* endeavor of Art is therefore all-embracing: each unit who is inspired with a true *art-instinct* develops to the highest his own particular faculties, not for the glory of these special faculties, but for the glory of *general Manhood in Art.*[4]

This assertion emphasizes unification in every dimension: not only the synthesis of the arts into a into a new art form, but unification and liberation of mankind. The artwork of the future would serve not only as the pinnacle of art, but the pinnacle of human endeavor. It would unify time and

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[3] Geck, *Richard Wagner: A Life in Music,* 102.

[4] Wagner, *Art-work of the Future,* 183-184.

culture, rejuvenating the shades of ancient Athenian drama while projecting itself toward the future.

> The highest conjoint work of art is the *Drama*: it can only be at hand in all its *possible* fulness, when in it each *separate branch of art* is at hand in *its own utmost fulness.* The true Drama is only conceivable as proceeding from a *common urgence of every art* towards the most direct appeal to a *common public.* In this Drama, each separate art can only bare its utmost secret to their common public through a mutual parleying with the other arts; for the purpose of each separate branch of art can only be fully attained by the reciprocal agreement and co-operation of all the branches in their common message.[5]

Wagner's call to action did not go unheeded. Both his works and his theoretical writings left a robust legacy, not only within the many sectors of the arts to which they applied directly, but far beyond. His emphasis on an accretive, multimedia creative process had ready applications across the humanities and well into the wider spheres of politics. Today we can see its broad theoretical orientation is particularly suited to film, and filmed propaganda, in particular.

Theater of control

There is a frenetic paranoia that animates all of the volumes of Wagner's bombastic prose. His impulsive tendencies with money, with women, with politics, had real effects—he experienced more than the average share of financial, political, romantic, and professional uncertainty in his life. Perhaps it is unsurprising that many of his most well-known theoretical writings stem from the years 1849-1858, his period of political exile in Zürich. Exhibiting all of the standard anxieties related to exile and alienation, he staged himself as a superhuman force in reviving the Greek musical drama tradition. In his conception of multimedia spectacle in *The Art-Work of the Future*, Wagner was not only seeking a method of transcendent artistic and

[5] Wagner, *Art-work of the Future,* 184.

cultural expression; he envisioned the form specifically within a social practice of communion and public ritual—the antidote to isolation and exclusion. Moreover, writing from exile in Switzerland, he envisioned the pinnacle of this dramatic form, despite its notable predecessors in Greek, Italian, and French cultures, as explicitly German. In these theoretical documents, Wagner thus sets the stage for an epic narrative in which he, the creator of this almost celestial form of art, will sweep in and triumph, the ultimate aesthetic hero.[6]

One inconvenient truth spurs Wagner's palpable insecurity in his writings: his uncompromising dedication to an art form that depends on a horde of other people for its fulfillment. His description of the poverty of written words in *Art-Work of the Future* is especially notable because, for most readers, it simply isn't very accurate—most contemporary examinations of reading arrive at the consensus that reading is an active creative process: a personal spectacle.[7] If the words on the page might seem unadorned, it is because their ornamentation takes place in the mind of the reader. But readers don't need critics or studies to reveal that Wagner's scorn is misplaced—anyone who enjoys reading likely feels more than the "wintry stem of speech" when they read the "penman's scrawl."

Where Wagner's description of the poverty of written text does fit extremely aptly, however, is as a description of written music. Storytelling, whether oral or written, always involves the transfer of meaning from author to reader—the reader's imagination extrapolates from words the building blocks to construct the story. The contours of the narrative are always

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[6] Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand*, 38.

[7] See in particular: Kivy, *The Performance of Reading.*

shaped by the reader's frame of experience, and while not every reader connects with every text, words on a page provide much of the same material as words that are spoken.[8]

The same is not true for music. Wagner's description of the "wintered toneless signs of Writing" applies much more to musical notation than it does to the writing of words. In order to exist as music, the notes on the page must be transfigured through the body of a performer, or, in the case of opera, through the bodies of many dozens of performers and theatrical professionals. In his interview with Edward Said in *Parallels and Parallaxes*, conductor Daniel Barenboim noted:

> Music is different form the written word because music only exists when the sound is created. When Beethoven wrote the Fifth Symphony, it simply existed as a figment of his imagination and was subject to physical laws that he imagined only in his brain. And then he used the only known system of notation, which is black spots on white paper. And nobody is going to convince me that these black spots on white paper are the Fifth Symphony. The Fifth Symphony comes into being only when an orchestra, somewhere in the world, decides to play it. Therefore, the peculiarity of music resides in the fact that there's this phenomenon of sound and that music means different things to so many different people, whether it's something poetic mathematic, or sensual, whatever it is. But in the end, music expresses it only through sound, which is, Busoni says, sonorous air, that's basically all it is. And therefore, when you talk about fidelity, fidelity to what? You're talking about fidelity of a very approximated, poor system.[9]

[8] Audio presentations of written texts introduce an additional dimension of mediation here, so I write primarily of the visual act of reading. However, even with listening, the listener co-constructs the story along with the storyteller. Depending on the mode of delivery, however, audiences may also enjoy the signposts of inflection, gesture, and other performance cues to further shape their reception of the narrative.

[9] Barenboim and Said, *Parallels and Paradoxes,* 111-112.

Wagner's particularly grandiose visions for the orchestra and stage meant that he had to depend on collaboration with hundreds of individuals in order for his works to come to life.[10] To his discomfort, he believed ardently in the power of the communal, embodied experience of this art form. Full control of such a process is simply never possible. Though Wagner's theatrical ambitions were explicitly, exhaustively of his own design, his writings betray his near constant irritation at his inability to fully control his artistic output.

Bayreuth

Wagner's efforts at control, however, were extraordinary. He stage-managed his brand on a monumental scale, and the success he achieved in attaining control over the domain of his artistic works is perhaps unmatched by any other artist in history.[11] His theatrical mandates still cast a long shadow in Bavaria—well over a century after his death, his custom-built festival theater in Bayreuth performs a hand-vetted selection of his compositions: aside from a brief period after the second World War, in its nearly 150-year history, it has championed the works of Wagner almost exclusively. Moreover, the company of the Bayreuth Festival is still helmed by

[10] Like Barenboim, here, I intentionally sidestep the issue of extensive musical training or prodigious talent—it is true that there are those who can and do hear an unfamiliar operatic score in full symphonic dimensions when they look at it in print for the first time, but as this ability is generally the result of hundreds (or thousands) of hours of experience hearing music in performance (including one's own performances), I view this capability as a function of the memory of performed sound rather than as a separate process of imagination and creation. There are those who would take issue with my position here, but it can at least be agreed upon that the ability to hear a full orchestral score (particularly of a work previously unknown to the viewer) when looking at a printed page is extremely rare when compared to the comparatively mundane practice of visualizing an event when reading words that describe it.

[11] Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand*, 38.

members of the Wagner family.[12] As the sesquicentennial of his death approaches, his company retains its popularity and influence: gaining tickets to performances of his operas, at the theater he built, in the festival he established, now run by his great-granddaughters, requires a lottery entry and often a decade-long wait. Wagner's works are performed worldwide, but audiences still go to considerable trouble to hear his works in the space he created exclusively for them. His fans defend his works rabidly against instances of perceived infidelity to the originals. There are other artists who have generated such devotion, but the case of Wagner as a brand is unique in its material particularities. Though others have reached a similar level of fame, no artistic project to date matches what Wagner achieved in the establishment of the double-headed Bayreuth canon and the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. The attempt to import this constellation of power, writings, artworks, and physical spaces into literary form bears fascinating potential in examining how audiences watch, listen, read, write, and imagine.

The following chapters represent a practical exploration of the set of authorial strategies that I identify as Wagnerian. My use of the title "Wagnerian Novel" reflects my conviction that the novels of Gabriele d'Annunzio, Marcel Proust, and Thomas Mann are not attempts to stamp their novels with Wagner's name or isolated themes relating to his practices. They attempt to translate the transcendent multimedia experience that Wagner championed into the domain of prose. In so doing, they tightly choreograph their presentation of the often-invisible body of the authorial self, the presentation of the mediating body of the performer, and the receptive body of

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[12] The Bayreuth canon includes only the ten operas of Wagner's middle and late periods: *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin, Tristan und Isolde, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Parsifal*, and the four operas of *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. The current directors of the Festival are Wagner's great-granddaughters Eva Wagner-Pasquier and Katharina Wagner. (Millington, *The Sorcerer of Bayreuth*, 301.)

the spectator in a quest to bring their audiences to a new understanding of their place in the world. *Il fuoco*, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and *Doctor Faustus*, all prose, all set contemporaneously with their authors' lives, nonetheless resonate as having transported Wagner's artistic practices into prose. In these cases, the material confines of the books replace the dimensions of the Bayreuth stage, and the reader takes up the mantle of the creator.

The Wagnerian Trinity

Bodies matter for Wagner. Embodiment is perhaps the most vital component that divides the novel and the opera—opera is an embodied form on a vast scale. Most fundamentally, it requires the bodies of performers to enact it. However, Wagner's vast theoretical writings also trade heavily in his expectations and prescriptions for a variety of other bodies associated with his works. The most obvious of these is Wagner's obsession with his own body, his efforts to vigorously assert his presence as prime mover of his theatrical works. Though audiences today experience all of Wagner's theatrical works through the collective efforts of a swarm of mediating artists, Wagner took considerable and extraordinary measures to suture his own identity to his works in ways that feature himself as a constant point of reference. He was remarkably successful in this venture, and his success in establishing control of himself as a brand remains singular for an orchestral composer.

Wagner was fixated upon two additional types of bodies: the mediating bodies of those who enacted his works and the receptive bodies of his audience members. Approaching Wagner's work through the lens of these three distinct categories of body provides a revealing window into Wagner's works, and the same categories will offer productive avenues of development for the

novelists who adapt his works. I argue that Wagner's tacit emphasis on this trio of theatrical roles —author, perfomer, audience—establishes the narrative framework for the novels of Gabriele d'Annunzio, Marcel Proust, and Thomas Mann. The remainder of this chapter will explore how Wagner employed these three bodily fixations.

I. **The Gospel according to Richard: Form, control, autobiography**

> That Wagner was the greatest egotist in the history of the arts is perhaps debatable, but there can be no doubt that the world has never seen his equal as an artistic booster.
>
> -Joseph Kerman,
> *Opera and the Morbidity of Music*[13]

In *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand,* Nicholas Vazsonyi coins the term "permalore" to refer to the nimbus of commentary that perpetually engulfs Richard Wagner, "a narrative web of such glacial density that (it) impedes alternative accounts."[14] Though the fetishization of artists is neither new nor singular, the case of Wagner is notable, Vazsonyi argues, in the degree to which it is self-imposed: Wagner mobilized diverse resources to cultivate not only his art, but his artistic aura. To this day, "Wagner's version of his story and explanation of his work have traditionally been the starting points for anyone wishing to write about him."[15] Thanks in part to the sheer vastness of Wagner's voluminous publications and to the continuing juggernaut of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, some commentary on Wagner takes as

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[13] Kerman, *Opera and the Morbidity of Music*, 285.

[14] Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand*, 9.

[15] Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand*, 9.

gospel the composer's own assessment of his contributions to the operatic genre. He took considerable advantage of the opportunity to reframe the past as a prelude to his life. Let us briefly, then, distinguish hype from history.

The idea that Wagner articulates, of a unified form of music, drama, myth, and spectacle based on the practices of ancient Athenian drama, has been present from the dawn of the operatic form. Resurrecting the Greek theatrical experience through musical drama was the explicit objective of the Florentine Camerata dei Bardi in the 1570's and 80's.[16] Moreover, the framing of the original performances of opera within festivals such as weddings meant that they enjoyed a corollary to the practice of Athenian drama as a tribute to Dionysius—performance of a spectacle of music, myth, dance within the context of a celebration of bodily desires. Both of these environments would have been open only to select groups of people: the Festival of Dionysius would have been limited to citizens of Athens (most likely excluding women, although scholarship remains undecided on this issue), the Florentine Camerata would have hosted only an aristocratic audience. Venice was the second seat of power of the opera kingdom—the first public opera house opened there in 1637.[17] Establishing documents refer to its relationship with the city's Carnivale, continuing the associations of fleshly liberation with the musicodramatic spectacle.[18] It is not incidental that these types of festive, stimulus-heavy environments also facilitate the presentation of what the critic Edward Cone deems "realistic singing." Cone offers up this moniker in a framework that distinguishes it from "operatic singing," singing that

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[16] Weiss, *Opera: A History in Documents*, 8.

[17] Weiss, *Opera: A History in Documents*, 34-35.

[18] Giuseppe Verdi takes particular advantage of this history in Act IV of *La Traviata*, when his heroine Violetta, close to death, hears the singing of celebrants of the Carnaval de Paris outside her window.

consists of moments that would not typically be sung (a conversation with a family member, a confrontation with a stranger, an observation about groceries).[19] "Realistic singing," in contrast, incorporates types of singing that wouldn't necessarily be out of place in life off the stage: tavern songs, military songs, folk songs, songs on boats or in the fields. By incorporating instances of "realistic singing"—sung performances that reflect the often-sung rituals of everyday life—in their operas alongside moments of "operatic singing"—staged singing featuring higher levels of artifice—composers can help blur the lines between stage and life.[20] The origins of opera in spectacular events such as aristocratic wedding festivities and Carnivale enhanced the possibilities for this conflation of real and surreal.

Moving forward in the chronicle of opera as "total work", in both the baroque and classical periods, composers Claudio Monteverdi and Christoph Gluck stressed an integration of text and music very similar to that which Wagner preached in his theoretical writings.[21] Nor was Wagner the first to lobby for the importance of poetic merit in operatic texts: poets Metastasio and Lorenzo da Ponte approached the creation of operatic libretti with a conviction regarding dramatic unity and purpose that foregrounded Wagner's.[22] [23] Da Ponte also helped shape the reception of his role in history through the publication of his memoirs.[24] Finally, Hector Berlioz used recurrent musical motifs that he referred to as *idées fixes,* particularly in his 1830 work

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[19] In simplest terms, "operatic singing" is the type of singing that opera un-enthusiasts tend to decry as ludicrous, unrealistic, and an impediment to their enjoyment of the form.

[20] Cone, *A View from Delft*, 126.

[21] Weiss, *Opera, a History in Documents*, 168.

[22] Weiss, *Opera, a History in Documents*, 92.

[23] Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera: The last 400 years*, 97.

[24] Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera: The last 400 years*, 123.

Symphonie Fantastique. Like Wagner, he also published extensively, not only as a music critic, on musical practices, including conducting and orchestration, but also as a citizen at large: Berlioz' *Mémoires* were first serialized in 1848. There is a tendency in literary criticism to ascribe Wagner's fame to his pursuit of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (in concept if not the term itself), but earlier works by other composers set forth some similar practices, yet receive only a fraction of Wagner's broader recognition.[25] Wagner's cultural influence cannot be confined primarily to his artistic innovations. I argue that much of Wagner's influence for would-be adapters springs from sites different from those upon which he staked his own claims. The opera composer is not a visible entity, as a matter of practice. Once their work passes into the hands of those who will interpret it, they disappear from its visual world. This dissertation will argue that both in terms of Wagner's own practices and the novelists who adapted him, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* can be interpreted not only as the combination of diverse artistic media in creating a unified work, but in the conspicuous binding of the authorial self to a multimedia work of art.

Given this focus on control and self-presentation, it is not merely a biographical quirk that Wagner created the Bayreuth Festival in which to present his own works. While ownership of many of the artistic innovations claimed by Wagner can reasonably be at least shared with other artists, the Bayreuth Festival was a singular undertaking, and remains so to this day. Yet Wagner's attempt at full control over his artistic output went even beyond the monumental task

[25] Here, it also bears noting that, though Wagner politicized his prescriptions for artistic excellence, championing the inherent superiority of Germanic opera, the majority of antecedents for his theatrical prescriptions were Italian, and important contributions were also made in France. Wagner downplayed these contributions to an almost comical degree in *Art-Work of the Future*. He did note more prominently the influence of German operatic composers such as Beethoven (though not with reference to *Fidelio*, his only opera) and Webern.

of creating a theatrical festival focused entirely on himself: Wagner's conscious and deliberate manipulation of his own public image helped to guarantee a total contamination of the categories of artist and artwork. Wagner's active courting of scandal, in tandem with his celebration of the cult of the artist, also helped ensure that the power of his art never exceeded his autobiography.

Wagner's many theoretical writings contain allusions to autobiographical details, but amidst his immense literary output was also an autobiography, *Mein Leben,* filled with fanciful detail, that he self-published in a limited quantity for his friends in 1870, the same year that Hector Berlioz' *Mémoires* were published in book form for a broader audience (Berlioz, Wagner's elder by 10 years, died in 1869). Wagner was well aware that the restricted supply would magnify public interest. In his letters, Wagner plots the posthumous publication of his memoirs on a larger scale, noting their potential to serve as a source of income for his son, Siegfried. The creation and dissemination of Wagner's autobiography can be read as a continuing effort for him to maintain control over his public image, but interestingly, it also serves to perpetuate the more scandalous elements of that image. Wagner did not shy away from treating the subjects of his public scandals, most importantly, his affair and eventual marriage to Cosima Liszt von Bülow. The daughter of Franz Liszt, Cosima was married to the pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow, Wagner's longtime collaborator and friend, when she met Wagner. She gave birth to three children with Wagner while still married to von Bülow (they finally divorced in 1870). All three of their children, Eva, Isolde, and Siegfried, were named after protagonists in the opera Wagner was writing at the time of their birth. It is a scandal worthy of 2017 reality television, and indeed, Cosima, like a precursor to the reality television storyrunner, kept a

meticulous diary of all of Wagner's actions from January of 1869 until February 12, 1883, the day before he died.[26]

Wagner's efforts to dominate the public conversation about himself (in both positive and negative ways) were astoundingly successful. Even Wagner's most aggressive critics unwittingly contribute to the fetishization of both the music and the man by continuously augmenting history with Wagner's autobiographical minutiae. Today, the controversies provoked by Wagner's well-publicized personal investments continue to dominate discussions of his work. The program notes to virtually every performance of Wagner's works includes references to the composer's virulent antisemitism and its aftermath: his family's close ties with Adolf Hitler, the role of his music in the Nazi regime (including its possible, though disputed, presence in Hitler's death camps), and the nation of Israel's continuing unofficial ban on the composer's music. Even the titles of books about Wagner by specialists reference this part of his legacy — M. Owen Lee's study *Wagner: The terrible man and his truthful art,* and John Deathridge's *Wagner: Beyond Good and Evil* are particularly explicit. Yet even the retelling of the unpleasant details of the Wagnerian legacy continues to serve Wagner's promotional purposes. Vazsonyi argues that the total conflation of art and biographical detail, scandalous or sublime, was precisely Wagner's design: continuing debate advances the cause of Wagner's cultural prominence.[27] Engineering an enduring entanglement of the personal, professional, and political with regard to his works may thus be ranked as one of Wagner's most immortal achievements.

From the vantage point of 2017, Wagner has enjoyed a surprising degree of success in

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[26] Skelton, "Introduction," in *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, Volume 1, 17-24.

[27] Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand*, 86.

linking his intellectual and physical corpora. At a recent symposium held by The Wagner Society of New York, buttons with Wagner's instantly-recognizable silhouette sold for $1 a piece. His face might not be instantly known to all those who have heard his Valkyries ride forth in films, advertisements, cartoons, and cell phone ringtones, but he continues to enjoy notoriety as a person, not just as composer. This dynamic has its downsides as well—productions of Richard Wagner's operas always open in the shadow of the man himself. This project argues that D'Annunzio, Proust, and Mann follow Wagner in manipulating their presentation of their authorial self within their narratives, problematizing issues of performance, truth, and legacy. Wagner is certainly not the only artistic model for the conflation of autobiography and fiction, but I will argue that his example is perhaps the most potent in recent history.

II. The Disciples: Priestesses at the temple of Bayreuth

One of Wagner's driving practices as an artist was in codifying as much as possible about his compositions: his written works document his composition process, his theoretical objectives, and the precise parameters of "authenticity" in productions of his works. One of the most vital sites of his fixation is on the wide range of individuals whose presence is necessary to perform his works. The bodies of the performers that will interpret his works are the media for Wagner's message, his necessary host organisms. From the physical dimensions of stagecraft, through the directors who staged his works, to the singing actors who played the parts, to the conductor and orchestra, Wagner had much to say about all of these components. Wagner's stage directions are precise and lengthy, a last attempt to make his authoritative desires known.

The Eternal Feminine

> Wagner is bad for youths; he is calamitous for women. What is a female Wagnerian, medically speaking? […] One cannot serve two masters when then name of one is Wagner. Wagner has redeemed woman; in return, woman has built Bayreuth for him. All sacrifice, all devotion; one has nothing that one would not give to him. Woman impoverishes herself for the benefit of the master, she becomes touching, she stands naked before him.
>
> -Friedrich Nietzsche,
> *The Case of Wagner* [28]

Wagner's presentation of the female body in his works is a dimension that recurs in striking ways in the novels I examine. Women occupy a peculiar space in the works of Wagner. His women characters are goddesses, protagonists, and often heroic figures, but they are burdened with unusual constraints, as well.

Skewed gender dynamics aren't unusual in opera. The operatic stage as a whole represents an unusual space for women, both in terms of agency and limitations. As the prevalence of castrati waned in the 19th century, women became an essential component of operatic stagecraft. Stars with new power emerged as female artists seized stages and audiences.[29] Yet it would be naive to regard these factors as representing a space for definitive agency. As figures performing for both audiences and production teams, the bodies of singers are subject to intense control. While scrutiny regarding physical appearance and capabilities go along with the territory of being onstage, the roles for women also offer serious restrictions in

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[28] Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (Kaufmann translation), 185.

[29] See: Blackmer and Smith, *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera;* Abbate*: In Search of Opera*; Clément, *Opera, or the undoing of women*; and Smart, *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* for a spectrum of perspectives on this issue.

terms of performance possibilities: a striking number of female protagonists die by the end of their storylines. By and large, even if the women have a spectacular role while they are onstage, *opera seria* means a female bodycount.[30]

The numbers of the Bayreuth canon are slightly better than the industry average. Of the ten operas in the canon (only one of them a comedy), twelve protagonists die, but there are only two operas in which women die alone (*Lohengrin*'s Elsa and *Parsifal*'s Kundry). One couldn't call death uncommon in Wagner, but most of the deaths of Wagner's protagonists are paired couples, not single women—The Dutchman and Senta; Elisabeth and Tannhäuser; Tristan and Isolde; Siegmund and Sieglinde; Siegfried and Brünnhilde. Death in Wagner is not a gendered proposition in the way it is in opera in general. However, Wagner still makes a contribution to opera's skewed gender dynamics.

In one of his examinations of modernity and metropolitanism in "The Case of Wagner,", Nietzsche asks, "Have you ever noticed […] that Wagner's heroines never have children? — They *can't*, The despair with which Wagner tackled the problem of having Siegfried born at all shows *how* modern his feelings were at this point. — Siegfried 'emancipates women,' — but

[30] These dynamics persist even today. Of the top ten most performed operas in the world, currently: Verdi's *La traviata*, Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Puccini's *La bohème*, Puccini's *Tosca*, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro,* Mozart's *Don Giovanni,* and Verdi's *Rigoletto,* the body count for female protagonists is six of ten. ("Opera Statistics 2015/16," operabase.com.) Eliminate the comedies *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Le nozze di Figaro*, and it is six of eight. Moreover, most of these women die alone—only Tosca is joined by the male protagonist (and male antagonist, at her hand) as she heads to the underworld. *Don Giovanni* is the one outlier, with two male deaths and no (terminal) female casualties. Even off the stage, the presence of women in the primary leadership roles in opera (general directors, conductors, stage directors) remains remarkably rare in 2017. The necessity of the female voice means that there are many women on opera stages, but the roles of women in opera, both on and off stage, remain limited—glorious deaths abound. These gendered dynamics are not the primary concern of this study, however, they are relevant: all three of the novels I examine invoke the female body in striking and related ways. The positioning of women in opera in general and Wagner in particular is most certainly a source for this shared dynamic.

without any hope of progeny."[31] The female bodies most conspicuously absent from Wagner's stages are mothers. Though Wagner's works teem with fathers and father figures. Even when a mother and her offspring are present in an opera, they do not engage with each other in that capacity: Erda and her daughter Brünnhilde both take the stage in *Siegfried*, though they never share it or interact with each other. But it isn't that Wagner is unconcerned with parenthood: Brünnhilde has several touching scenes that invoke the theme of parenthood with her father, Wotan, and several characters, particularly Siegfried and Parsifal, sing with great tenderness and longing about their mothers. However, it strikes me as being of crucial importance that these mothers, while venerated, are not present. They do not appear onstage. The absence of motherhood from Wagner's stages does not, however, mean that women in his works are freed from the position of caretaking. It simply means that the women need never share their attention with children. Women's bodies in Wagner are at the disposal of their romantic partners, their idols, and occasionally, their fathers. The women characters in Wagner, as exemplified by Kundry's plea in *Parsifal*, "dienen," seem to exist to serve.[32]

The specifications of the gendered operatic body and the female body in Wagner are an important dynamic when novelists transpose both opera and Wagnerian opera. Embodiment is a defining feature of both operatic performance and spectatorship. Two delightfully nontraditional studies, Sam Abel's *Opera in the Flesh* and Wayne Koestenbaum's *The Queen's Throat,* deal in

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[31] Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (Kaufmann translation), 176.

[32] Martha Feldman offers up a different interpretation of the lack of mothers onstage after the French Revolution: "The sacred void that loomed with the destruction, symbolic and literal, of the king and queen left only one measurable space for women when all was said and done, a space of pure monumentality. Women would be the Nation, Freedom, Reason, Virtue, the Statue of Liberty bearing her torch—an infinitely imitable figure because unreal." (Feldman, "Absent mother in opera seria," *Siren Songs*, 44.) Wagner's women do typically take up the mantle of monumentality, so Feldman's assessment is interesting. However, freed from the duties of childbearing and rearing, these women also lavish care on the men in their domestic sphere.

particular with the eroticized power of the female singer's body (the throat, in particular). The mechanics of opera themselves mean a particular attention to an intimate feature—the operatic voice is breath, but scaled for a hall that seats thousands. The demands on the voice in Wagner's operas, in particular, must travel beyond his immense orchestra, sail over his densely textured instrumentation, and use accurate declamation that endows his words with their full poetic weight. These requirements are particular enough to have birthed an entire subcategory of singing, the Bayreuth bark: "a derogatory term that pithily caricatures the widely influential singing style encouraged at Bayreuth by Cosima Wagner during her tenure as festival director, in which clear enunciation of the text was thought to require hard tone, declamatory utterance of individual words, and explosive treatment of consonants."[33]

But it is not just the breath or volume that responds to these needs. Bodies look different when singing Wagner—the new trend of film opera has had to contend with the challenges inherent in seeing a singing actor in an extreme close-up. Bodies move and respond to the needs of the operatic voice in ways audiences are often unaccustomed to seeing in film actors (or even musical theater actors, who are generally miked). The intimacy in watching this intimate act writ large can be both compelling and disconcerting, but it is an inescapable component of the operatic experience. Consequently, the physical proximity simulated by the breath of the Wagnerian singer calls out for a compensatory corporeal focus in a novel that would seek to invoke it.

All of the texts I explore include actresses prominently in their narratives, and each of the novelists stages the actress's body in particular ways to highlight the tensions inherent in the

[33] Breckbill, "Bayreuth Bark," *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, 34.

operatic actress in general and Wagner's leading women in particular. By manipulating elements of female sexuality, disease, caretaking, and artistic authenticity in their narratives, d'Annunzio, Proust, and Mann adapt Wagner's fixations with the onstage female body to examine questions about creativity and death.

The stage as mediator

In the prologue to this chapter, I focused on the Bayreuth Festspielhaus as the model for the type of control Wagner sought over his artistic works. Even today, endowed with the stamp of "authenticity" lent by Wagner's descendants at the helm, the Bayreuth stage lends a distinctive frame to an audience's encounter with Wagner. Architectural staging will be a particularly useful narrative device for all of the authors I treat.

In his brief study, "The *Gesamtkunsthaus:* Music in *À rebours*," Andrés Villar makes a compelling argument that, "Huysmans' repetition and interweaving of motifs to construct the novel resembles Wagnerian techniques, but it is in the house as a total work of art that reference to the composer's theories is direct and substantial. Like Bayreuth, the protagonist's house is a hermetic performance space."[34] Huysmans' protagonist Des Esseintes constructs a synesthetic shell around himself, an environment that engages all of the senses in a precise, calibrated manner: an "orgue de bouche" offers an array of liqueurs that "jouait des symphonies intérieures, arrivait à se procurer, dans le gosier, des sensations analogues à celles que la musique verse à l'oreille. Du reste, chaque liqueur correspondait, selon lui, comme goût, au son d'un

[34] Villar, "The *Gesamtkunsthaus:* Music in *À rebours*."

instrument."[35] Meals, art, light—everything within the space is calculated to provide a precise aesthetic experience. He even embellishes nature: a tortoise is encrusted with gold and jewels until the point of death, "elle n'avait pu supporter le luxe éblouissant qu'on lui imposait, la rutilante chape dont on l'avait vêtue, les pierreries dont on lui avait pavé le dos, comme un ciboire."[36] The transformation of Des Esseintes' house into a stage for the performance of daily life (albeit daily life with an extremely aestheticized edge) is the type of transformation that is at the root of this project. I use the adjective Wagnerian as a gesture toward the idea that an artist can compress all of the sensations and encounters of a life (of both the author and protagonist alike) and stage manage them to the most minute degree for the benefit of the reader.

III. The Flock

The bodies of the audience members ostensibly motivate Wagner's highest purpose: offering a transcendental experience through multi-media communal spectacle. In exchange for this experience, Wagner requests sacrifices. Wagner's tendency toward long-windedness, both as a composer and as an author, makes him a frequent setup for punch lines. A 1999 documentary about stagehands at the San Francisco Opera during a cycle of Der Ring des Niebelungen is simply entitled *Sing Faster: The Stagehands'* Ring Cycle. But if the length of Wagner's productions offers his audiences a challenge, it also offers a greater volume of content. Recurring motifs work especially well to conjure different dynamics in the narrative when they have the

[35] Huysmans, *À rebours,* 47-48.

[36] Huysmans, *À rebours,* 52.

opportunity to expand in time—in the case of the *Ring*, motifs occur not only from act to act, over the course of several hours, but from opera to opera, over the course of several days.

Length does, however, operate as one of the many dimensions in which Wagner was prone to pursuing extremes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, even among opera enthusiasts, conversations about Wagner aren't generally renowned for their nuance. Wagner fanaticism is a particularly aggressive strain of operamania, and it is often countered by a compensatory Wagner hatred—sometimes both within a single person. Nietzsche, in print and in life both Wagner's greatest supporter and most cantankerous critic, accuses him of being overly pandering to the madding crowd. But others accuse him of being precisely the opposite—of being too intellectual and stuffy to appeal to the *Volk* whom he professed to address his compositions.

None of the texts I treat in this study is ever accused of being user-friendly, particularly in my reading of them, which takes their floods of embedded citations seriously. "Encyclopedic" is a term frequently referenced in criticism of all three novels, and indeed, the texts all serve as cultural repositories—a decent Western liberal arts curriculum could be structured just by using a list of reference points in each text. Hypertexts avant-la-technologie, they exist in technicolor only for those who have have attained easy recall on the cultural touchstones they use to construct their visual, aural, and narrative worlds. But *Il fuoco*, the *Recherche*, and *Doctor Faustus* are challenging for other reasons, as well. None of the texts is short. *Il fuoco* is misogynist and self-congratulatory to a degree rarely reached outside of parody. The *Recherche* is both complex and more than 3000 pages long—just its index of cultural references runs to hundreds of pages. *Doctor Faustus* is only moderately long, but it so dense and circular in its exposition that each paragraph seems to require its own explanatory volume. Mann himself

wrote a companion piece to accompany it—*The Story of a Novel: The genesis of Doctor Faustus.* Part diary and part self-exegesis, *The Story of a Novel* is ostensibly a chronicle of its composition of the novel, but it also positively identifies a number of references that are left ambiguous in the original text. All three of these texts continually challenge the reader's attention and dedication to to the project of reading. All of them have characteristics that could hinder their appeal to a broad audience, and because of their individual complexities, they are all texts that reward persistent rereading.

Recursive engagement

> He was the most passionate operagoer Vienna has ever had, as the *cognoscenti* know. He was an opera fanatic, and even when he had become totally impoverished and finally embittered (which was inevitable), he managed to afford daily visits to the opera, even if it meant standing through the performance. Even when he was gravely ill he would stand through the six hours of *Tristan* and still have the strength to shout "Bravo" or to whistle louder than anyone before or since.[37]
>
> -Thomas Bernhard,
> *Wittgenstein's Nephew*

In his 1993 collection, *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the philosophy of Music*, Peter Kivy argues for the central role of repetitive practices in music making—both from the position of the composer and the performer. From the composer's standpoint, repetition allows for development of an idea within a recognizeable framework—it is repetition that offers the

[37] Bernhard, *Wittgenstein's Nephew*, 27-28.

foundational thrust of sensation to populate Wagner's musical motifs. For the performer, repetition is a vital part of preparing for performance.[38] Kivy also explores the dimensions of reception for the audience, in particular, in terms of works that incorporate repetition within their structure. Recurring motifs link past and present, allowing the listener to perceive shifts over time. But one dimension that is particularly resonant in a comparison of encounters with opera and novels is the anticipated exposure of the audience.

Recursion will form an important part of my examination, and indeed, it is an vital factor in in examining the possibility of translating opera to text. However, first, a note on reception. One of the greatest challenges in conceptualizing this project has been taking into account the ways in which operatic spectatorship differs from the process of reading a novel. This seems like something of a banal observation, but it is a vital one. Novel reading and opera viewing both take place in time, but the relationship to time is different in both, and viewing a single opera generally involves a much smaller quantity of time than reading a novel (even in the case of Wagner's operas, which are famously longwinded). While casual opera spectatorship certainly exists, opera attracts a large number of obsessive fans, and consequently, opera spectatorship tends to be recursive to a unique degree. It is not unusual for an opera enthusiast to see an opera live dozens of times over a lifetime, and the ease of encountering opera in performance has only expanded with the increasing quality and accessibility of recordings (both video and audio). Few other types of live dramatic performance generate such a cult following, and when they do, it is a

[38] Kivy, *The Fine Art of Repetition,* 105.

notable and extraordinary occurrence (though not live, the *Star Wars* films and all of the *Star Trek* series come to mind).[39]

In the criticism to date that links Wagner and literature, the resonances often focus on narrative references and repeated motifs, but practical dimensions of reception, so mundane to anyone who spends a great deal of time at the opera house, are omitted. Opera enthusiasts (particularly Wagner enthusiasts) often have large swathes of libretti memorized. This obsessive attention to detail, in concert with repeated viewings, means that viewers tend to be aware of minor details that might otherwise be passed over. A work such as the *Harry Potter* series, recently, offers a resonant point of comparison in re-reading, but it is extremely unusual among books.[40] Interestingly, all of the texts that I will treat trade in this level of detail---that is, benefit from being experienced multiple times in sequence, as one would an opera. Proust, in particular, has been the focus of a great deal of criticism on this subject.[41] It is not coincidental, however, that there is one other framework in which texts are experienced this way—with obsessive attention, many times, often to the point of memorization. That is with religious texts.

All of Wagner's most meaningful artistic obsessions are corporeal: he is fixated upon his own body, the prime mover of artistic glory—he seeks acclaim for his works, but not at the cost of his own identity being subsumed in the work. He is fixated upon the bodies of the performers who interpret his works, who bear the heavy burden of serving as mediums between his artworks

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[39] Benzecry, *The Opera Fanatic*, 68, 7.

[40] As a book intended for the youth market, *Harry Potter* perhaps makes a point—children's books frequently trade heavily in repetitive encounters in both form and function, both of which are less common in books for the adult market. The books of Dr. Seuss, intended for an even younger audience than *Harry Potter*, use an even more liberal hand.

[41] Numerous theorists have noted that the structure of Proust's *Recherche*, in particular, encourages re-reading. See in particular: Compagnon, *Lire et re-lire Proust*, and Debenedetti, *Rileggere Proust e altri saggi Proustiani.*

and the public. And finally, he is fixated upon the bodies of his audience members, whom he aims to lead toward transcendence. His fixations are corporeal because his objectives are corporeal: harnessing dimensions of art, myth, politics, history, words, sounds, images, architecture, and movement, Wagner uses all of the sensory material he can muster to bring about a physical response in his audiences.

But even in the case of Wagner, it cannot be argued that all art forms serve equally toward this purpose of transcendence. Though Wagner is fanatically dedicated to his multimedia objectives, he is also a follower of Schopenhauer, and for Schopenhauer, the most powerful artistic medium is music. It is Wagner the musical genius that, for many, makes it possible to redeem Wagner the corrosive antisemite.

Musical and dramatic practices

The conception of music as space for transcendence is, finally, the heartbeat of this project. *Il fuoco*, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and *Doctor Faustus* are all novels in which the narrative follows the artistic awakening of an artist-hero. All of them signal their debts to Wagner with conspicuously prominent references to his life and works. All of them feature a fictional composer in a prominent position in the narrative: the protagonists Stelio Effrena and Adrian Leverkühn in *Il fuoco* and *Doctor Faustus*, a neighbor of the protagonist, M. Vinteuil, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. All of these texts contain unusually voluminous references to real-world art, architecture, history, geography, philosophy, and music. All of these novels act as hypertexts—using the reader's assumed memory of these references as a narrative tool, they instantly transport the reader from one artistic space to another. These are not just any hypertexts,

however, but hypertexts obsessed with performance, embodiment, and the role of the book in preserving a legacy. Proust's particular brand of hypertextuality has generated a mountain of theoretical frameworks, one in particular that is relevant to all of the texts in this study. In his essay, "HyperProust", Joshua Giddings posits the term "biotext" to serve as a word for:

> the interpenetration [...] of a particular individual life and a set of writings. [...] (W)hat makes the term useful in application to Proust is that it offers a way of envisioning intertextuality—the interrelationship not only of texts but of 'biotexts' as well—in terms of hypertextuality.We might say that the "biotext" is an expression of intertextuality in the age of hypertextuality. What a hypertext does is give us not just a reference to another text or set of texts (which is what an intertext does) but that actual experience of linking, of making a connection to another text or web of texts. This more experiential, existential appropriation of the text by the interactive reader constitutes the reader's version of the "biotext". In other words, the reader's experience of a hypertext is felt as an active and interactive linking between intertexts, not just a passive intertextual registering of references and allusions.[42]

To this end, each of these works contains, in a pivotal position in the narrative, the work of a fictional composer, a line of narrative music that remains, necessarily, silent. It is this silent narrative space, carefully carved into the narrative by the host of other staging techniques, that rebuilds the transformative space that Wagner sought to compose into his performance works. By invoking music, arguably the most essential of Wagner's artistic contributions, in words rather than sound, these texts construct the corporeal realities of the total work of art using the tools of the novel. It is this narrative space in these works, in conjunction with their semantic noisiness elsewhere, that makes these texts such a useful forum for exploration. In the end, then, this project is an examination of the performance of narrative silence in these works, a quality that renders all these texts vital to the evolution of the modernist novel. My methodology will consist

[42] Gidding, "HyperProust," *Proust in Perspective*, 275.

primarily of paired close readings: by placing text and multimedia intertext into dialogue, I will to investigate the defining borders of narrative silence.

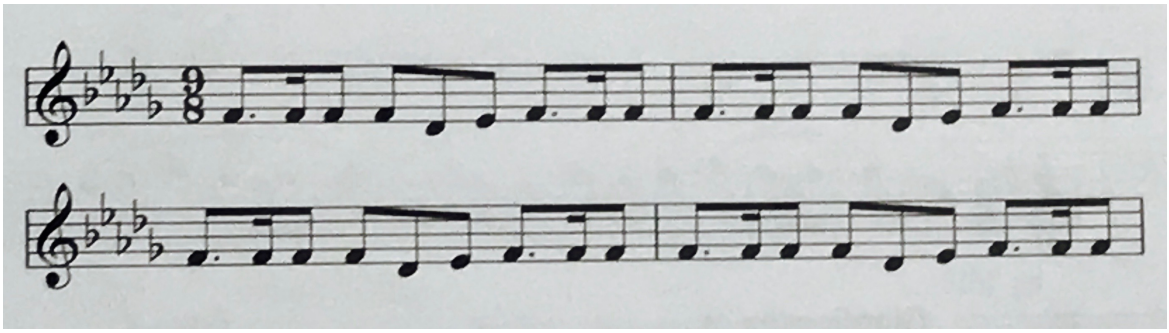
In the three novels I will treat, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal* are the Wagnerian dramas that garner the most prominent references. Both dramas are ambitious and groundbreaking from a musical and narrative standpoint, and both boast a wide number of commentators who consider them Wagner's finest works. But Wagner's most comprehensive undertaking is the four-opera cycle *Der Ring des Niebelungen*, which stretches even Wagner's own generous use of time into sixteen hours of performance.

Though the majority of the close reading in this study will be literary rather than musical, here, I'd like to take a brief look at the instrumental structure of one particular set of reference points in the *Ring* cycle—the descent into Nibelheim in *Das Rheingold* and the Nibelheim motif's brief reappearance in Siegfried's forging scene in *Siegfried*. Both thematically and musically, these scenes take transformation as their subject. Moreover, the way in which Wagner interweaves musical points of reference with instrumentation and wordplay in these sections is particularly useful for the texts I treat.

Many commentators isolate some of Wagner's most powerful dramatic and musical moments as those that involve the natural environment, often scenes that only partially involve words—the shepherd's pipe in *Tristan und Isolde* and the birdsong in *Siegfried* are particularly popular references. Similarly, the element that interests me most in these two references is the fact that they challenge the borders between reality and stage. This pair of references (the descent into Nibelheim and the forging motif), separated by several musical hours, blend a strange range

of details, resulting in a product very similar to the pastiche forms that the novelists who adapt Wagner achieve.

First, the motival setup. In *Das Rheingold,* the first opera of the series, the gods Wotan and Loge journey into Nibelheim, the realm of the dwarves, in order to bring back the enchanted gold that the dwarf Alberich has stolen from the Rhinemaidens. Alberich has turned the gold into a ring, and using its power, has established a sweat shop of sorts. As Wotan and Loge descend from the realm of the gods, the Nibelheim motif enters for the first time:



The Nibelheim/forging motif from
Wagner's *Das Rheingold*.

The instrumentation of this scene is a subject of Wagnerian lore. The score calls for eighteen tuned anvils in three octaves of F.[43] In the Met's 2011 performance, principal tympanist Dick Horowitz, after testing a variety of sounds, made his own out of "an aluminum electrical tube three inches in diameter whose wall is about one-quarter inch thick […cut…] with a rotary saw using very hard teeth. When struck at different points they achieve the notes and pitches Wagner called for. They look nothing like anvils, but the sound is unforgettable." [44]

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[43] Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, 194-205.

[44] Plotkin, "Pursuing Anvil Leads."

Das Rheingold isn't the first opera to use supplementary anvils—Fromental Halévy uses them during a jewelry shop scene in *La Juive* and Giuseppe Verdi uses them in *Il Trovatore*'s "Anvil Chorus." But what is so compelling in *Das Rheingold* is Wagner's blending of orchestrated soundscape, quotidian materials, and mythic realms. It is helpful here to return to Edward Cone's two categories of singing in music drama: operatic and realistic.[45] If we adapt this categorization to examine anvils rather than voices, rhythmic anvils fit into the realistic category: anvils are used for forging metal; they sound the same while forging metal as they do while being struck within in an orchestra pit to mimic the sound of forging metal. Here, the line between reality and stage performance is blurred.

In *Das Rheingold*, Wagner imports material objects from daily life into the orchestra. There, these materials ring out to evoke not a quotidian scene, but a mythical realm. Though their sounds are not unheard of in the operatic orchestra, they are certainly unusual within it, and their arrival is not signaled by any text or preparation for the viewer. It is, however, framed by the music. At measure 1835, the cellos begin with a transformational rhythm—not quite the Nibelheim motif, but gesturing towards it. At 1852, the primary motif takes shape; at 1862, the instruments drop out altogether and the anvils take over. For nine measures, the only instruments playing are the anvils, then the orchestra returns for nine measures, and finally, over thirteen measures, the motif transitions out. It is an electrifying passage of music, and it is driven primarily by rhythm and the tools of human life. It also vigorously embeds the human and the quotidian within the greater mythical orchestration of the Wagnerian soundscape.

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[45] Cone, *A View from Delft*, 126.

Arthur Schopenhauer's valorization of music above all other art forms was due to its non-representational quality. In his 1819 treatise, *The World as Will and Representation,* he argues that music is distinct from "all other forms of art in that it does not depict phenomena […] but is the direct expression of the Will itself and thus pits the metaphysical against the physical things of this world, the thing-in-itself against all phenomena." [46] Wagner was an ardent admirer of Schopenhauer at this point in his life, but with the Nibelheim descent, he does something unusual with music. By using tools of daily life as instruments, Wagner gestures toward real representation, but directs it toward a mythical realm. In so doing, he transforms the orchestra, the anvils, the presentation of reality, and the audience.[47] So even in this component, which is missing words, Wagner is representing something that verges upon concrete. He sets words to these sensations in the subsequent scene, which opens with Alberich abusing the beings under his power in Nibelheim.

All of these embedded dynamics return into play in the next passage I will treat, which occurs in *Siegfried*, two operas beyond *Das Rheingold* in Wagner's tetralogy. Siegfried's forging anthem is both typical and atypical of the compositional practices Wagner championed in his manifesti. In the first case, it is atypical of Wagner's song because it can be excerpted and performed as a stand-alone number:[48] Though the motival development loops in and out for roughly ten minutes beyond the short "aria" excerpt (the aria chronicles the beginning of forging

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[46] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* Volume 1, 366.

[47] In their resonance with Verdi's anvil use, Wagner's anvils also incorporate an embedded reference, not only to the members of the nomadic tribe that work with the anvils in *Il Trovatore*, but to the aria "Stride la vampa" that follows the chorus, beginning with flames and ending with a horrific mistake made in the shadow of corruption and evil.

[48] The protagonist Adrian Leverkühn, in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, complains about having to hear it sung out in public.

Siegfried's sword, but the motif returns as he finishes forging it), it does have a short kernel of a melody that exists on its own. It also employs not *Grundmotive* but *Grundrhythmus:* as Siegfried forges the sword, he begins to tap a rhythm on the anvil. Though he has never heard the Nibelheim anvils, Siegfried taps their rhythm on his onstage anvil. Wagner is renowned for his comedic prowess, at least in his theatrical works, but this dramatic scene picks up on comedic elements.[49] Siegfried intuits the rhythm of Nibelheim as he works to build the sword that will eventually kill his foster father and enemy, the Nibelung Mime. It is the quotidian become mythic.

Transformation

Wagner's endgame, in every possible dimension, was transformation. In a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck on October 29, 1859, he wrote:

> I should now like to call my deepest and most subtle art the art of transition, for the whole fabric of my art is built up on such transitions: sharp and sudden changes I have come to dislike: they are often unavoidable and necessary, but even then they may not occur unless the atmosphere has been so carefully prepared for the sudden change that it seems inevitable. My greatest masterpiece of the art of the most subtle, most gradual transition is certainly the big scene of the second act of *Tristan und Isolde.* This scene begins with pulsating life at its most passionate—and ends with the most mystical, innermost longing for death.[50]

Here, Wagner refers in particular to a precise musical practice: the transition between keys in the second act of *Tristan und Isolde*. However, the idea of transition and transformation animates all of Wagner's artistic endeavors. He hoped to transform ancient Athenian drama into a new form

[49] If one is tempted to read the comedy in this scene as unintentional, some confirmation of comedic intent arrives in the fact that it is parodied in Wagner's sole mature comedy, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, when the cobbler Hans Sachs sings while loudly tapping a (scored) rhythm as he finishes a shoe.

[50] Wagner, *Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck on October 29, 1859, Wagner: A Documentary Study*, 189.

of theater, which would rejuvenate and shape the audiences of the future. He hoped to compose works that would break through the stylistic barriers of past forms. He hoped to transform his theoretical ideas and personal experiences into a body of work that would share his good news long after he was dead. Wagner's massive output of criticism, autobiography, and theory exists so that he could influence every dimension of his works for the theater, leaving them permanently marked by his presence. He aimed not just to transform music, but to transform stages, orchestras, and singers into the ideal vessels for his productions. Finally, he hoped to transform audiences through the reception of his works.

Il fuoco, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and *Doctor Faustus* all take transformation as their primary point of focus. However, they do not simply ask their readers to serve as witnesses to their protagonists' transformations. They carefully build up the visual, spatial, and musical elements of their stories. They establish music as the primary motivator of transcendence, then they cut the sound. The reader is left with space and silence in which to experience the "formless void," with "darkness cover(ing) the face of the deep." [51] These novels each ask the readers to play the part of creator.

Though the creation of the world that Ovid evokes at the beginning of his *Metamorphoses* occurs very near the beginning, it is not his "In the beginning." The first lines of the epic are:

> I want to speak about bodies changed into new
> forms. You, gods, since you are the ones who alter these,
> and all other things, inspire my attempt, and spin
> out a continuous thread of words,

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[51] *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Genesis, 1.2.

from the world's first origins to my own time.[52]

Ovid frames the *Metamorphoses* as an attempt to construct a line of narrative that draws upon every element of the world to prepare for his existence as a storyteller. He writes of transformation, but in transforming story into words, and words into writing, he is performing transformation even as he verbalizes it. Wagner aspires for his audiences to undergo transformation via the reception of his dramatic works. The novels I treat do not ask this. Instead, using the tools elaborated by Wagner, but transposed to prose, they ask their readers to become creators, transforming their experience of the narratives through the source material of their own lives. While their narrative techniques help transform modern prose, they also posit new ways of presenting and experiencing musical drama. In offering up their printed form for the reader's consumption, they offer a total sensory experience for their reader, the type of controlled performance to which Wagner aspired but could never realize in his chosen medium.

[52] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 5.

Chapter Two
Gabriele d'Annunzio's *Il fuoco:* Notes toward a *Gesamtkunstroman*

> — Il drama non può essere se non un rito o un messaggio— sentenziò allora Daniele Glauro. — Bisogna che la rappresentazione sia resa novamente solenne come una cerimonia, comprendendo essa i due elementi constitutivi d'ogni culto: la persona vivente in cui si incarna su la scena come dinanzi all'altare il verbo d'un Rivelatore; la presenza della moltitudine muta come nei templi…
> — Bayreuth! —interruppe il principe Hoditz.
> — No; il Gianicolo; — gridò Stelio Effrena uscendo all'improvviso dal suo silenzio vertiginoso — un colle romano. Non il legno e il mattone dell'Alta Franconia; noi avremo sul colle romano un teatro di marmo.
>
> -Gabriele d'Annunzio,
> *Il fuoco* [53]

A reader need not possess keen powers of observation to find Richard Wagner in Gabriele d'Annunzio's 1900 novel *Il fuoco*—after serving as a frequent topic of discussion and speculation in the narrative, the composer makes an appearance in the flesh at *Il fuoco*'s midpoint. While traveling to his lodgings at Venice's Palazzo Vendramin-Calergi with his wife and father-in-law, Wagner is seized by a sudden attack. *Il fuoco*'s protagonist, Stelio Effrena, passing by with his friend Daniele Glauro, sees Wagner succumb to the weakness of his "gran cuore malato" and collapse:

> Ma entrambi trasalirono vedendo il vecchio reclinato volgersi a un tratto con il gesto di chi affoga nel buio e aggrapparsi convulsamente alla sua compagna che gittò un grido. Accorsero. Quanti erano sul battello, colpiti dal grido angoscioso, accorsero, si affollarono intorno. Uno sguardo della donna bastò perchè nessuno osasse di avvicinarsi al corpo che pareva esanime. Ella medesima lo sostenne, lo adagiò sul sedile, gli palpò i polsi, gli si chinò sul cuore, in ascolto. Il suo amore e il suo dolore segnavano intorno

[53] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco,* 103-104. (Unless otherwise, citations of *Il fuoco* refer to the 2008 edition.)

all'uomo inerte un cerchio inviolabile. Tutti indietreggiarono, rimasero in silenzio, ansiosi, spiando su quel volto livido i segni del ritorno alla conoscenza.

Il volto era immobile, abbandonato su le ginocchia della donna. Due profondi solchi scendevano per le gote verso la bocca semiaperta, s'incavavano presso le pinne del curvo naso imperioso. Le raffiche movevano i capelli radi e sottilissimi su la fronte convessa, la bianca collana di barba sotto il mento quadrato ove la robustezza dell'osso mascellare appariva a traverso le grinze molli. Dalla tempia stillava un sudore viscido, e un lieve tremito agitava uno dei piedi pendente. Ogni minimo segno di quella figura smorta restò impresso nello spirito dei due giovani per sempre.[54]

The two young men help to carry Wagner to the shore. They are transformed and invigorated by the experience.

Il fuoco's narrative follows the heroic journey of the poet-composer Effrena as he conceptualizes his own Total Work of Art: a poetico-musical drama to be performed in a custom-built theater on Rome's Janiculum hill. Given the novel's subject matter, it is natural that Wagner's fame in the text precedes his physical appearance on scene. As Effrena strategizes his masterpiece, he draws heavily upon the high points in the history of *dramma per musica*, touching upon the practices of ancient Athenian drama, the theories of the Florentine Camerata de' Bardi, and the innovations (and claimed innovations) of Wagner himself. [55] As in the case of Wagner's theatrical works, every dimension of Effrena's work operates on multiple levels of symbolic significance. Of particular note is the interpolated plot of Effrena's dramatic masterpiece, in which his protagonists journey in search of ancient artifacts of Mycenae. There, Effrena's play asks its actors to confront the physical relics of mythic figures — they eventually discover the material remains of Cassandra and Agamemnon. D'Annunzio's readers must also

[54] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 174-175.

[55] Interestingly, though Effrena is obsessed with championing the Italian opera lineage, he completely omits massively influential 19th century Italian composers such as Rossini and Verdi from his reckoning—his assessment privileges artists that were part of opera's early lineage in Tuscany and Venice.

grapple with the conflation of dramatic narrative and reality: the plot of the drama that Effrena "develops" in *Il fuoco* already exists in theatrical form. It is d'Annunzio's own *La città morta*.[56]

D'Annunzio's staging tactics in *Il fuoco* emphasize performance and interpretation at every turn. Effrena's theatrical ambitions, the primary storyline, evolve through a series of conversations and performances, both public and private, and dialogue drives narrative exposition. Two subplots run alongside the primary heroic artist narrative: Effrena's evolving sexual and artistic relationship with his primary collaborator, the actress Foscarina; and the decline and death of Richard Wagner, whom Effrena and his friends encounter during his final days in Venice. Both subsidiary storylines feature a different admixture of aesthetic fixation, erotic intrigue, sickness, and creative potential, the same basic ingredients as the primary narrative, and both subplots underscore the blazing trajectory of Effrena's artistic vision. Within these three strands of narratives, digressive interventions highlight the mythbuilding process, drawing attention to the circuitous pathways by which symbols are rehearsed and codified through storytelling.

In *Il fuoco*, D'Annunzio uses Effrena as a mouthpiece for several of his real-life works, complicating the presentation of author and protagonist. These insertions, and the stature accorded to them in the novel, did not go unnoticed—from the outset, *Il fuoco* was received as a thinly veiled autobiography. Writing in 1900, Angelo Conti called the novel "la sintesi di tutta la vita e di tutta l'opera di Gabriele d'Annunzio, è l'espressione ultima della sua maestria e della

[56] *La città morta* premiered in Paris in 1898 as *La ville morte*, with Sarah Bernhardt in the lead role of Anna. Eleonora Duse, whose prose resemblance can be found in *Il fuoco*'s Foscarina, played Anna in the Italian premiere in Milan in 1901. (Guidotti, *Forme del tragico nel teatro italiano del novecento*, 23.)

sua inquietudine, è un addio inesorabile ed è un atteso riconoscimento." [57] The author's self-citation practices in *Il fuoco* did not spring from his mind fully formed, however. They echo the scope of Wagner's publication practices outside of opera. In writing his novel manifesto and placing his own works within it, d'Annunzio inscribes his identity as artist into both the history and future of the art form his protagonist venerates.

Poet, seducer, and preacher of war

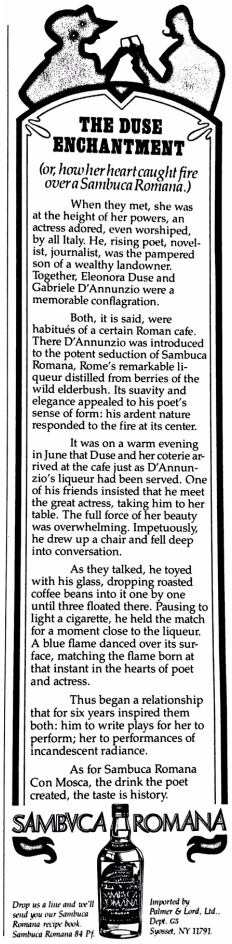
In "Proust lecteur de d'Annunzio," Roberto Gramolini introduces *Il fuoco* as "un roman aujourd'hui illisible à cause de son empreinte nietzschéenne, du délire mégalomane du protagoniste Stelio Effrena, des souffrances qu'il inflige à sa maîtresse, la Foscarina, personnages derrière lesquels on reconnaît d'Annunzio et Eleonora Duse, la grande actrice italienne." [58] Indeed, depending on the reader's tolerance for misogyny and grandstanding, *Il fuoco* can be an unpleasant novel to read. But several of the dimensions that Gramolini objects to so strongly are precisely those that cement the text to the Wagnerian legacy, namely: transparent autobiographical insertions, grandiose artistic fantasies, and a persistent fixation on the female body's service to art (and the world). By using the historical time and place of Wagner's death as the novel's setting, d'Annunzio is able to symbolically bury his predecessor's legacy: in conversations with his aesthetically minded friends, Effrena deconstructs Wagner's German opera boosting from *Art-work of the future,* staking, in its place, Italy's claims to inborn operatic

[57] Conti, "*Il fuoco* di Gabriele d'Annunzio," *Come leggere Il fuoco di d'Annunzio,* 91.

[58] Gramolini, "Proust lecteur de d'Annunzio," 407.

superiority. At the end of the novel, Effrena serves as a pallbearer as Wagner's corpse is ushered out of the country.

A reputation for difficulty doesn't necessarily set d'Annunzio apart in the company of texts I am working with in this study. Mirroring Wagner's own reputation in popular culture, Proust and Mann are also authors who are often regarded in the public imagination as challenging, or at the very least, longwinded. However, unlike the *Recherche* and *Doctor Faustus*, the lack of appeal for *Il fuoco* cannot be reduced to its length (just 344 pages, even in its robustly annotated 2008 critical edition by BUR). *Il fuoco* is a remarkably dense text; virtually every page contains a web of symbolic and real-world references that a average reader might prefer to avoid. But the *Recherche* and *Doctor Faustus* are also dense, and though the challenges they present a reader might limit their potential audience, these dimensions have not proved detrimental in either of the texts' status as pillars of the modernist canon.



No single factor seems to account for the general tendency of international criticism to overlook d'Annunzio's influence on 20th century literary forms. Indeed, the more one digs, the more surprising this gap is. In part due to the scandalous particularities of *Il fuoco*, d'Annunzio was both a towering artistic figure and international tabloid fodder in his day.[59] *The New York Times'* coverage of him around the turn of the century offers

[59] As late as 1985, his name, alongside that of Eleonora Duse, at least held some popular sway in the United States—a Sambuca Romana ad posted in *Gourmet,* alongside recipes for "Sausage in Pastry with Honey Mustard" and "Herb-Marinated Mozzarella" uses an apocryphal story about the couple's first encounter to hype their product.

such gems as the headline "D'Annunzio and Duse Quarrel" and catty speculation as to the success of *Parisina*, his 1913 operatic collaboration with the composer Pietro Mascagni: "Scoffers predict row. Knowing the temperaments of the two geniuses, they wonder if it all won't end in the law courts."[60] [61] If today's tastes don't always align with d'Annunzio's characteristic prose style (long, adjective-laden sentences, multiple layers of symbolism, a tendency to perpetually self-gloss), he was nonetheless the subject of considerable fascination by the writers and tastemakers of his time, many of whom remain popular today.

In an essay on d'Annunzio from 1902, just after the publication of *Il fuoco*, Henry James rhapsodizes on his style and skill:

> The author's three sharpest signs are already unmistakeable: first his rare notation of states of excited sensibility; second his splendid visual sense, the quick generosity of his response to the message, as we nowadays say, of aspects and appearances, to the beauty of places and things; third his ample and exquisite style, his curious, various, inquisitive, always active employment of language as a means of communication and representation. So close is the marriage between his power of "rendering," in the light of the imagination, and whatever he sees and feels that we should much mislead in speaking of his manner as a thing distinct from the matter submitted to it. The fusion is complete and admirable, so that, though his work is nothing if not "literary," we see no point of it where literature or where life begins or ends: we swallow our successive morsels with as little question as we swallow food that has by proper preparation been reduced to singleness of savour. It is brought home to us afresh that there is no complete creation without style any more than there is complete music without sound; also that when language becomes as closely applied and impressed a thing as for the most part in the volumes before us the fact of artistic creation is registered at a stroke. It is never more present than in the thick-sown illustrative images and figures that fairly bloom under d'Annunzio's hand.[62]

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[60] "D'Annunzio and Duse Quarrel," *The New York Times,* 2 January 1904.

[61] "D'Annunzio and Mascagni Opera," *The New York Times,* 28 April 1912.

[62] James, *Notes on Novelists*, 254-255.

Indeed, the more one delves into d'Annunzio's absence in international accounts of the modern literature in Europe,[63] the less convincing justification on the grounds of his style becomes — Joris-Karl Huysmans and Oscar Wilde often favored the meandering, symbol- and adjective-rich style that d'Annunzio's prose exemplified, and unlike him, they have remained steady critical favorites. If they are not always read as unimpeachably modern, they are at least considered important precursors to the development of modernist prose.

In *Gabriele d'Annunzio: Dark Flame*, Paolo Valesio refers to this absence, the "literary injustice committed with regard to Gabriele d'Annunzio," as "the most flagrant of the twentieth century in Italy and perhaps in all of Europe." [64] Valesio suggests that one possible explanation for the lack of international critical attention on d'Annunzio in the twentieth (and now twenty-first) century might be a sense of moral outrage: he laments the "pernicious negative trend" of "subordinat(ing) literary judgments to moralistic and political criteria, even while defending the autonomy of art and literature." [65] Lucy Hughes-Hallett's spectacularly idiosyncratic biography, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer, and Preacher of War,* echoes this possibility, elaborating:

> D'Annunzio was a man of broad and deep culture, thoughtful, widely read in the classics and in modern literature. He spoke for Beauty, for Life, for Love, for the Imagination (his capitals)—all of which sound like good things. Yet he helped to drag Italy into an unnecessary war, not because he believed it would bring any advantage but because he craved cataclysmic violence. His adventure in Fiume fatally destabilized Italy's democracy, and opened the way for all the bombast and thuggery of fascism.[66]

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[63] I write specifically of international criticism. In Italian criticism, d'Annunzio is still recognized as a canonical voice, if one that is dated stylistically.

[64] Valesio, *Gabriele d'Annunzio: The Dark Flame*, 1.

[65] Valesio, *Gabriele d'Annunzio: The Dark Flame*, 1.

[66] Hughes-Hallet, *Gabriele d'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer, and Preacher of War*, 6.

As for *Il fuoco* in particular, there is one tendency that is transparently problematic: d'Annunzio's conspicuous manipulation of autobiographical features within the fictional narrative. D'Annunzio's hyperbolic positioning of Effrena as a man apart, particularly in reference to his artistic collaborator and love interest Foscarina, risked rendering not just the characters, but also the author himself, deeply unsympathetic. On the correlation between Foscarina and Duse, Attilio Mazza notes: "la Duse fu lucidamente consapevole del significato di quelle pagine: la Foscarina era lei, con le sue piccole mani, a cominciare dalla paura d'invecchiare; e suoi erano i trascorsi amorosi, le scenate di gelosia, mentre Gabriele, nei panni di Stelio Effrena, riservò a se stesso un ruolo di gloria." [67] The word got out quickly. Just before the novel's release, Eleonora Duse's manager, having heard rumors of its content, secured proofs. He shared them with Duse, certain she would wish to halt its publication. She responded only that she knew the novel's content and had given her permission, as she was "a woman of forty and in love."[68]

The many autobiographical checkpoints for both d'Annunzio and Duse in the text serve not only to heighten awareness of Effrena's overlap with d'Annunzio, but to engage the reader as a voyeur in a barrage of more intimate encounters with his real-life paramour. Renato Barilli refers to the novel as "un autobiografico 'bricolage.'" [69] *Il fuoco* swiftly landed on the Vatican's index of banned books. But whether it produced pleasure or pain, the scandal sold.[70] After the novel's publication, Duse and d'Annunzio's affair, previously unconfirmed, became international

[67] Mazza, *D'annunzio e le donne,* 91.

[68] Harding, *Age Cannot Wither; the Story of Duse and d'Annunzio*, 142.

[69] Barilli, *D'Annunzio in prosa,* 126.

[70] Anthony Rhodes frames its publication as a publicity stunt. (Rhodes, *Poet as superman*, 100.)

news. Bertita Harding notes that, whether the reading public called d'Annunzio "a cad or a *canaille,* his name was manifestly on everybody's lips. He had become a celebrity. [...] The book was frowned upon but avidly purchased, so that a stream of royalties, including profits on foreign translations, flowed into the poet's cash box." [71]

Despite the flurry of activity around the correlation of Duse and Foscarina, Foscarina's trajectory in *Il fuoco*'s narrative is not exclusively tragic. She remains alive, after all, and a number of critics have noted her "elevated" position in the narrative: she is not only the author's muse, but at the end of the narrative, her talent and celebrity enable her to fund her lover's artistic ventures by going on tour.[72] However, with her excruciating resemblance to Duse, the fact that her body and artistry are served up as sacrificial victim in service of Effrena's art makes the narrative more emotionally loaded than it might be otherwise. Hughes-Hallet entitles the Duse chapter of her biography of D'Annunzio simply: "Cruelty."[73]

As my broad field of exploration in this project centers on the practices used to provide readers with a transcendent reading experience, details such as readerly pleasure are not irrelevant. *ll fuoco* features a spectacular range of prose innovations that appeal directly to my interests, but I still find the novel generally unpleasant to read.[74] In Wagner's case, the music can

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[71] Harding, *Age Cannot Wither; the Story of Duse and d'Annunzio*, 147.

[72] Itself a reference, once again, to Duse, who toured extensively with d'Annunzio's plays to raise money for his personal and artistic ambitions. Duse's celebrity, however, was not sufficient to win audiences over to his works, a fact that the actress' biographers tend to note with some glee. (Harding, *Age Cannot Wither; the Story of Duse and d'Annunzio*, 149, 155)

[73] Hughes-Hallet, *Gabriele d'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer, and Preacher of War*, 193.

[74] I am reminded of the ready accessibility of celebrities to their audiences in the age of Twitter. While a taste of the (carefully curated) intimate life of a celebrity personality can provoke excitement, too much information can sour the voyeur's enjoyment.

win us back over when the narrative (or the facts of Wagner's life) threaten to send us fleeing. With d'Annunzio, we remain tied to the prose.

Motive

In *Il fuoco*, Gabriele d'Annunzio imports the breadth of Wagnerian autobiographical, theatrical, and theoretical output into the novel format. By overlaying the narrative with a pastiche of references drawn from art, literature, history, and music, in concert with a relentless focus on the authorial self, the mediation of the performing body (particularly the female body), and the receptive body of the audience, *Il fuoco* offers a kaleidoscopic guide to techniques for adapting Wagner into a prose format. In building this set of approaches for cross-media transposition, *Il fuoco* helps set the course for modernist prose.

This chapter will explore *Il fuoco* as a manifesto in narrative for the Wagnerian novel. Because I read *Il fuoco* as the foundational example of this genre, I will first use it to establish the parameters I will apply to this designation. In the first part of this exploration, these elements are primarily intertextual. I will examine book structure; Venice as a staging device; and intertextual (and intermedial) references to the legends of Bacchus, Pentheus, and Ariadne. I will then present a series of five performances in d'Annunzio's prose rendition: an inflammatory speech given by the protagonist, a performance of Benedetto Marcello's *Arianna*, a Camerata-style debate between Effrena and his a friends, a sexual encounter between Effrena and Foscarina, and finally, an offhand ritual memorializing of Wagner. These events are all drawn from the first half of the book. In the second part of this analysis, I will focus on elements of

fertility, artistic creation, silence, and Wagner's death. Finally, I will explore d'Annunzio's own artistic trajectory after *Il fuoco.* Toward what ends did his manifesto serve?

Prose drama in two acts

From the first words of *Il fuoco*, d'Annunzio capitalizes upon the visual staging advantages of the novel form to shape the reader's experience of the narrative. *Il fuoco* is divided into two sections, each marked with a title that pre-conditions its interpretation. The first part, "L'Epifania del fuoco," takes as its guiding themes bombast, performance, and revelation. It comprises a single night in "l'ultimo crepusculo di settembre"—twilight through morning of the next day. The second part, "L'impero del silenzio," catches the transition from fall into winter: the first time indication given in the second part is "in un pomeriggio di novembre" and the narrative ends "un' ora dopo mezzogiorno " on February 12, 1883.[75] D'Annunzio intensifies the tension between the tone of the two acts by maintaining narrative continuity while he shifts stylistic modes. The action remains in Venice; very little time has elapsed between the parts; and all of the protagonists of part two have already made their entrances by the end of part one (in conversation, if not in person). Framed by these shared components, the reader is best primed to comprehend the divergence between the parts. Because this text is not well known and I will refer to its dimensions in minute detail, the plot unfolds as follows:

> I. *L'epiphania del fuoco*:
> In Venice, poet Stelio Effrena's companions (both platonic and romantic) lend support as he plots his future artistic glory. At the Palazzo Ducale, Effrena gives a rousing but heavily symbolic speech about the allegorical marriage of Venice and Autumn to introduce a production of a neglected Venetian opera, Benedetto Marcello's *Arianna.*

[75] D'Annunzio dates the end of his text "Settignano di Desiderio: li 13 febbraio MDCCCC", bearing the important echo of that other 13 February (1883), the date Wagner died. (D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 168, 341, 344)

> Effrena is inspired by his own act of speech-giving, the response of the crowd, and the subsequent performance of *Arianna* by the singer Donatella Arvale. At an after-theater dinner party hosted by his actress collaborator and muse, Foscarina, Effrena and his friends engage in a vigorous conversation about idealized theatrical forms. They discuss Richard Wagner, both in his capacity as artistic icon and in the flesh: Wagner himself is a newly arrived visitor in Venice. Effrena's inspiration grows. After the meal, Effrena initiates a long-awaited sexual relationship with Foscarina. Invigorated by this encounter, the next morning Effrena, ultraconfident, leaves Foscarina's villa. He asks his gondolier to stop at the palazzo where Wagner is staying and, meditating on the composer's failing health, tosses flowers at his doorstep. Hungry, he buys food, then asks his gondolier to flag down a passing fishing boat, climbs aboard it, and sails off into the sunrise.
>
> II. *L'impero del silenzio*:
> Foscarina contemplates a painting at Venice's *Academia*. At the ripe age of 34, she is terrorized by her perceived loss of youth, particularly as it might be noticed by her younger lover. Effrena and Foscarina talk about death and their relationship then cap it off with a graphic sexual encounter. Effrena, on a gondola with his friend Daniele Glauro, sees Richard Wagner passing by with his wife, Cosima Wagner, and her father, Franz Liszt. Wagner collapses, and Effrena and Glauro help to carry him ashore. Effrena invigorated by the experience of and begins to conceive of his masterwork (a musical drama with a "Dionysian trinity" of leading women: a singer, an actress, and dancer) in great clarity. Stelio and Foscarina travel around the Venetian islands sharing memories and parables with each other. Foscarina decides to leave Italy to go on tour abroad. Glauro brings news that Wagner is dead. Effrena and Glauro serve as pallbearers for Wagner, whose body leaves Venice to travel back to Germany for burial. Effrena is inspired; the natural landscape of Italy rises to meet his inspiration.

Whereas public performances and proclamations drive much of the action in "L'epifania del fuoco," "L'impero del silencio" unfolds primarily as a series of intimate encounters—often between Effrena and Foscarina or Effrena and Daniele. In both parts, Effrena is virtually never alone—the narrative proceeds primarily through dialogue.

The narration is third person omniscient, with occasional dips into free indirect discourse, which blur the lines between spectator and performer. Indeed, the dynamics of spectatorship propel the majority narrative, though this takes on a quieter, more voyeuristic character in the second part, in which Effrena travels between the islands of Venice, his conversations punctuated

by moments of artistic invention and fantasy. But alongside the conversations on aesthetics and the details of Effrena's evolving work, a new expressive genre dominates the second part: parable. While Effrena's "Allegory of Autumn" speech serves as a fulcrum for the action of the "L'epifania del Fuoco," the performance itself is the centerpiece in the action, not an interpretation of it. In contrast, in the second part, virtually all conversations are driven by the exchange of symbolic stories between individuals. Though the content of the stories varies, death looms large in all. From a formal standpoint, the most vital dimension of d'Annunzio's shift into using parable is that it primes the reader to do the work of creating meaning through exegesis.

Beyond the bipartite division, the text is subdivided into an additional twenty-five typographical breaks. D'Annunzio does not title any additional parts, instead, he uses untitled chapter breaks that offer the readers a visual fermata—the spatial impression of silence between scenes. In the first edition, twenty of these breaks take the form of four spaced lines between parts, five take the form of unmarked page breaks.[76] [77] I stress these typographical breaks because though these visual markers, d'Annunzio draws attention to both the fragmentation and fluidity of his narrative. Text practices at the turn of the century placed increasing attention on the presentation of text as a font for generating meaning; d'Annunzio's practices here are in precise alignment with this sensitivity.[78] In this particular instance, d'Annunzio's practice is

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[76] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco* (1900).

[77] The 2008 Rizzoli edition renders the four-line breaks of the first edition as single line breaks (so they provide less of a perceptible break in the text), but the positioning in the text remains the same. This is the version to which I will refer in the remainder of the text. (D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco,* 2008.)

[78] Attention to generating artistic meaning through experimentation with typography and typesetting would rise significantly in subsequent years—F. T. Marinetti's myriad *Manifesti Futuristi* (1909-1913) and Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes: Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre (1913-1916)* attest to the potential for innovative typographical practices.

subtly reminiscent of Wagner's process of through-composition, eschewing hard stops between numbers and blending boundaries between individual scenes.

Il fuoco is a deceptively simple novel. Though its linear heroic narrative appears rather straightforward, the density of symbolism most closely resembles poetry—individual paragraphs generate lengthy catalogues of allusions and clarifications. Its narrative style is also highly hybridized: aesthetic analysis, autobiographical allusions, philosophical excursions, and parables exist side-by-side with description and dialogue. *Il fuoco* is the story of the flowering of an artist, and its digressive narrative moments serve the dual purposes of expounding critically on the powers and potential of art while intensifying the anticipation for the eventual payoff of narrative action.

The text sparkles with a universe of artistic and historical references, some used in extended elaborations on art, some simply name-checked. At numerous points in the narrative, d'Annunzio simply offers extended lists of artistic references, all of them bearing real-life referents to parse.[79] These concrete referents span the gamut of reader accessibility: public spaces in Venice and beyond, Venetian folk songs, Greek and Roman myth, theater, sacred and secular music, artistic manifesti, poetry, and legend. The most prominent of the real-world referents, however, is Richard Wagner, who appears both as symbol within the heady ether of aesthetic debate and as flesh and blood character. But it is not Wagner's presence in the text that leads me to deem *Il fuoco* a Wagnerian Novel, but the fact that d'Annunzio's staging tactics for

[79] Inspired by the incredible utility of the index for Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, I charted a preliminary index of references in *Il fuoco*. Using only the proper names cited explicitly in the text, it reached 1157 reference points.

his prose are relentlessly, concretely multisensory. *Il fuoco*'s autobiographical dimensions and sheer sensory noisiness leads me instead to refer to it as a spectacle in novel format.

I use the term spectacle with the minimum figurative cast possible. In incorporating a vast range of known artworks, texts, landmarks, and musical compositions into his narrative, d'Annunzio is essentially serving as writer, set designer, architect, dramaturge, casting director, and composer. He isn't describing these elements as an author of a realist novel might: by calling out proper nouns to populate the novel with sights and sounds, he simply drops them before our eyes (and ears). Of course, this is not exactly a populist form of scenebuilding: the effect of d'Annunzio's particular tactics depends largely on the reader's ready access to its cultural treasures. For full impact, she must be able conjure these referents in real time, at the same rapid-fire pace that d'Annunzio sets them forth in the narrative. It is here that the novel diverges most significantly from Wagner's multimedia efforts. One of the most obvious distinctions between performances of musical drama and novel reading is that the multimedia references in d'Annunzio do not read as multimedia unless one knows what they are—-they remain simply names, null sets of sensory association. However, if we presume a reader who has a working facility with d'Annunzio's encyclopedic range of narrative props, this text reads in stereo and Technicolor.

Wagner and the Wagnerian Novel

In the preceding chapter, I argued that a work of music only reaches its full expression when it is embodied. I also argued that Wagner's tripartite fixation on bodies involved the following components: 1) artist, 2) performer, 3) audience. Any materials the author can provide

for the performer, beyond the artwork itself, have the potential to enhance the reception for the audience member, or, at least, to bring the experience as an audience member closer in line with the artist's desires. A similar transformation happens in the reception of the Wagnerian novel, with a meaningful shift: 1) artist, 2a) mediator, literal (the physical form of the book, the vessel), 2b) mediator, metaphorical: mediating bodies within the text, often performers, often female, often actresses, 3) audience members: co-creators of text imagery.

Several elements make the details of the shift from opera to book so interesting: first, the author is able to seamlessly integrate the work of art and the presentation of self—because both practices take place within a single medium, they can function as a simultaneous endeavor. Second, as medium, the physical dimensions of the book are much easier to control. The artist's finished product can travel directly to the reader. (Metaphorical mediating bodies still hold symbolic weight within the narrative proper.) The most exciting shift, however, is that audience members for a book, far from being pure receptacles for the novel, must co-create its imagery along with the text. As Roland Barthes notes in "From Work to Text," "the text is very much a score of this new kind: it asks of the reader a practical collaboration."[80] Part of the magic of the novel form in general is that its audience has been transformed from spectator to creator. In the novels I treat, this dynamic is particularly intense because of their conscientious multimedia orientation.

The bipartite structure of *Il fuoco* effectively mirrors this system of transfer of meaning through material. The first part of the novel teems with cultural references and performances, priming the reader with concrete artistic information. The second half of the novel trades

[80] Barthes, "From work to text," *Image, Music, Text*, 163.

primarily in the forms of parable and allegory. Using the sensory information from the first half as raw data, the reader must construct meaning from her interpretation of metaphor, abstract imagery, silence, and death.

Treading the boards of Venice

> —Ah, le imagini! — esclamò il poeta, tutto invaso dal calore fecondo. —A Venezia, come non si può sentire se non per modi musicali così non si può pensare se non per imagini.
>
> -Gabriele d'Annunzio,
> *Il fuoco*[81]

The particulars of Wagner's death site are fortuitous for d'Annunzio; it is hard to imagine a more suitable environment than Venice in which to stage the multimedia prose of *Il fuoco*. Venice's geography, architecture, and historical features dominate the narrative landscape from the first page, but they always operate as more than simple geographic data points—each reference carries with it a catalog of symbolic potential. While many of the hundreds of references to classical art, literature, and music in *Il fuoco* might be unfamiliar to the average reader, knowledge of iconic locations from Venice is more readily accessible. D'Annunzio trades on the city's currency in the public imagination as he builds the backdrop for the narrative action. Duse's biographer refers to the text as a "poetic Baedecker for an imaginary trip through golden Venice."[82]

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[81] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 15.

[82] Harding, *Age Cannot Wither; the Story of Duse and d'Annunzio*, 144.

Architectural references build a concrete frame of action for the reader—public spaces are easily visualizable and come prepackaged the sensory detail. The relationship of stone and water produces a unique soundstage, and d'Annunzio follows Wagner in his close attention to ambient sound, particularly that of water on the marble foundations of the city:

> "Lo strepito di un'acclamazione sorse dal traghetto di San Gregorio, echeggiò pel Canal Grande ripercotendosi nei dischi preziosi di porfido e di serpentino che ingemmano la casa dei Dario inclinata come una cortigiana decrepita sotto la pompa dei suoi monili." [83]

The watery opening of the text, particularly in a novel that takes Wagner as a central focus, draws sensory resonance from the opening drone of the Rhine in Wagner's *Das Rheingold.*

View of the angel on the campanile, Basilica di San Marco, Venice.

To punctuate this continuo, D'Annunzio draws heavily on the sounds of the church bells of the most famous of Venetian landmarks. In these cases, references to architecture invoke not only the aural, but also the visual, "gli angeli che splendevano su i campanili di San Marco e di San Giorgio Maggiore."[84]

In this, the first geographical indication of the novel, D'Annunzio fuses sight and sound, architecture and sculpture. The bells are not ringing here, and the bells in *Il fuoco* are, notably, often silent. But even if their sounds are not articulated by the text, the conflation of architecture and sonic potential holds sensory weight. It also increases anticipation. When the bells finally do make noise, they

[83] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 8.

[84] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 7.

will offer rhythmic texture for pivotal moments in the text, like the peals that ring out just before the death of Wagner is announced: [85]

> Dai campanili prossimi, da San Lazzaro, da San Canciano, da San Giovanni e Paolo, da Santa Maria dei Miracoli, da Santa Maria del Pianto altre voci risposero ; e il rombo su le loro teste era così forte ch'essi credevano sentirlo nelle radici dei capelli come un brivido della carne loro.[86]

By anchoring abstract sensory detail and symbolist parable in the built environment, d'Annunzio stabilizes some of the more digressive and experimental components of the narrative.

While Venetian architecture sets the foundation of the d'Annunzian stage in *Il fuoco*, the hundreds of references to fine art in the text offer props and set dressing, filling the stage with color, light, and narrative reference points. D'Annunzio draws from a broad system of references, but he places particular focus on works from the Venetian cultural lineage—references to Tintoretto, Veronese, Carpaccio, and Tiziano are particularly prominent. Beyond paintings and sculpture, d'Annunzio will also highlight medallions and the art of glassmaking, drawing upon regional cultural practices to enhance his reality effect.

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[85] As technology advances, modern journalistic practices increasingly harness the power that atmospheric sound can exert on a narrative. A 2016 article in *Texas Monthly* commemorating the 50th anniversary of the University of Texas Tower shooting incorporated an embedded recording of the tower bells in the digital version of the article. The reader scrolls to the paragraph that describes the experience of a victim wounded in the shooting to read that, "Every fifteen minutes, the Tower's bell would chime, but it was nearly half an hour before the sound of sirens neared, and even then, no help came." When this line hits the midpoint of the window, a recording of the tower bells plays spontaneously. What is particularly effective about the fusing of the sounds of particular bells to a narrative that the actual sound is both uniquely identifiable and effectively generalizable. To someone for whom those particular bells are familiar, the inclusion of this spontaneous sound within the tower shooting narrative offers a visceral shock. However, one need not have experienced these particular bells to access a cache of emotions associated with the familiar pattern of large bells ringing the hour. (Pamela Colloff, "The Reckoning," *Texas Monthly*.) The same is true of the many Venetian bells that ring out in *Il fuoco* — they operate symbolically on both specific and general planes. The blending of symbolic and local registers with bells is familiar territory for those adapting or performing Wagner. An article on the Vienna Staatsoper website promoting a 2017 production of *Parsifal* chronicles the production's search for a recording of the ideal bell sounds to use in the production's transformation scenes in Act I and III. (Rovakis, "Auf die suche nach dem Glockenklang," *Wiener Staatsoper.*) A related link on the site offers visitors the chance to download the chosen bells for use as a ringtone ("Die *Parsifal* Glocken als Klingelton," *Wiener Staatsoper*.)

[86] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 337.

The historical political spectacles of Venice also provide an opening for d'Annunzio to examine the role of political performance and societal ritual. Once again, he conscripts architecture to this purpose: both public and private spaces exert influence in the performance of power. While many of d'Annunzio's hundreds of references within *Il fuoco* require the reader to match d'Annunzio's stamina for obtaining knowledge,[87] the blending of high-culture references with local practices and public spectacle offers a degree of accessibility. It also underscores the communal power of theatricality in the political sphere—the reigning class' performances of power and status while traveling the Venetian canals help to maintain their authority. In staging his artistic interventions within the frame of public ritual, d'Annunzio models the reach of artistic power: unbound from consecrated spaces such as museums, theaters, or salons, it stretches easily into the religious and political spheres and beyond, to communal daily activity.

Historical references span everything from political history of the city to d'Annunzio's own history in it. Venice's long trajectory in the public eye allows d'Annunzio to reframe history to emphasize the artistic lineage he proposes, building a nationalistic component into his dreams for artistic glory. He follows Wagner in this, as well. But d'Annunzio is able to out-do Wagner here. Whereas Wagner's genealogy of opera aggressively minimizes the contributions of the Florentine Camerata, Effrena and his friends reminisce about the Florentine Camerata within an environment that reproduces it. Effrena and his friends refer to Wagner as both "barbaro" and "creatore barbarico;" d'Annunzio leans on opera's Italian heritage to underscore Effrena's

[87] His stamina was virtually inhuman, as it was supported by a wide range of chemical adjuvants—d'Annunzio's cultural appetite and literary output were extraordinarily large. (Mazza, *Le medicine di d'Annunzio nella farmacia del vittoriale*, 100.)

legitimacy as its heir.[88] The origins of modern opera are situated in the Camerata de' Bardi in Florence, but Venice is the location of the first public opera theater.[89]

Venice also unites the two parts of the novel, serving as a natural performance space as well as a natural repository for Italian symbolism. While Wagner insisted on the superiority of the German landscape and the German temperament's suitability for staging music, d'Annunzio will proclaim Italy as the new site for future *dramme per musica*. As d'Annunzio unifies politics and art, he also binds imperial history and the musical future: Effrena's projected theater is not set in Rome by chance. All roads do not lead to Bayreuth.

A synesthete's hymn to Dionysius

D'Annunzio broadcasts performance as his central narrative concern from *Il fuoco*'s opening lines on, following Wagner's technique of integrating strands of an opera's thematic content into a meaningful *Vorspiel.*[90] Rather than panning across a cinematic landscape, d'Annunzio opens on Alighieri'shis two protagonists mid-dialogue. There is no call to the muses to aid his narrator (or his poet protagonist). Instead, the muse calls out to Effrena: The first voice in the novel is that of the actress Foscarina, the poet's collaborator and inspiration.

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[88] "Barbaro" in this context isn't exclusively pejorative: with its frequent references to *Bacchae*, *Il fuoco* also nods to the power of the "stranger" archetype.

[89] Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 48.

[90] Even before the narrative opening, d'Annunzio frontloads his system of literary references with five opening epigraphs, four of them citations. The first appears on the title page, "…fa come natura face in foco" from Dante Alighieri's *Divina commedia.* (Alighieri*, III,* 4.77) A dedication, "al tempo e alla speranza" follows, then three additional citations:"Senza la speranza è impossibile trovare l'insperato" (Heraclitus, from *Fragment 18*); "Colui il quale canta al dio un canto di speranza, vedrà compiersi il suo vóto" (Aeschylus, from *Libation Bearers*), "Il tempo è padre dei prodigi" (Hariri di Basra, *Seventh Maqamat*). Given the prominence of citation and artistic legacy in this novel as a whole, this glut of of opening citations offers a mosaic of ideas from disparate sources, establishing a dense referential frame for the narrative.

> Stelio, non vi trema il cuore, per la prima volta? – chiese la Foscarina con un sorriso tenue, toccando la mano dell'amico taciturno che le sedeva al fianco. – Vi veggo un poco pallido e pensieroso. Ecco una bella sera di trionfo per un grande poeta!
>
> Uno sguardo le adunò negli occhi esperti tutta la bellezza diffusa per l'ultimo crepuscolo di settembre divinamente, così che in quell'animato cielo bruno le ghirlande di luce che creava il remo nell'acqua da presso cinsero gli angeli ardui che splendevano da lungi su i campanili di San Marco e di San Giorgio Maggiore.[91]

Foscarina's eyes aren't her only "expert" part. Every element of her characterization in the opening lines testifies to her expertise as an interpreter and performer of roles. She reads Effrena's physical body and speculates as to the impact of his upcoming performance to manipulate the physical body, here, the heart itself.[92] The heartbeat's correlation with anticipation is well-established literary cliché, but here, the reference calls the reader's attention not only to issues of romance or corporeality, but also sound. Throughout *Il fuoco*, D'Annunzio will lean heavily upon the rhythmic sounds of the human body (breath and heartbeat in particular) in his descriptions. Though Foscarina is the first in the narrative to speak, in this opening passage, she also performs her anxiety with use of at ingratiating physical gestures (her smile is weak, she touches him to punctuate her words, though she is already near him). Physical gesture is prominent throughout the text as well, vital not only for its invoking of the narrative body, but its importance in dramatic interpretation. Effrena and his friends will comment extensively on the power of Foscarina's hands, both as an actress and as a woman—here, we see them not as the object of the male spectator's gaze, but as part of a larger attempt to build intimacy.

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[91] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 7.

[92] Contemporary medical studies generally confirm long-standing assumptions regarding the ability of music and the anticipation of performance to affect the heart rate. (Bernardi et al, "Dynamic interactions between musical, cardiovascular, and cerebral rhythms in humans," *Circulation.*)

Foscarina engages with Effrena with a disciple's care and concern. Ever sensitive to her onstage collaborator, she visually interprets ("vi veggo") Effrena's physical state (silent, pale, lost in thought). Using leading phrasing ("non vi trema"), she projects onto Effrena the particular intensity with which he is already experiencing his forthcoming poetic "trionfo," the specifications of which are completely opaque. Despite the use of "amico" and Foscarina's almost motherly solicitousness, the protagonists both use the formal "voi" to refer to each other, establishing a degree of distance amidst the intimacy. The opening passage of the novel is notable in its intense fixation on the corporeal response to important events—the physical changes these events precipitate are established by the narrator, then interpreted and remarked upon by Foscarina. The seeds of Wagner's embodied trinity are already present here: authorial self, performer, audience. The poet protagonist Effrena shares a profession with d'Annunzio the author; the actress Foscarina both interprets and venerates the dramatic poet Effrena; Foscarina's exegesis of Effrena's body language models the meaning that spectators can glean from a performance. These currents of autobiography, performance, and spectatorship will drive the narrative through its final words.

Though Foscarina intones the first word of the text, D'Annunzio establishes her character primarily in terms of her relationship to Effrena (though the reader has already learned that Stelio is a poet at this point, we know only that Foscarina has "occhi esperti" and is dedicated to him). D'Annunzio underscores the actress' intimacy with Stelio through reference to eye contact, a dynamic that will remain a constant site of emotional transfer for the couple throughout the

narrative.[93]

The female host

Of all the literary works woven into the tapestry of allusions in *Il fuoco*, Euripides' *Bacchae* offers one of the most vibrant strands of content. With *Bacchae*'s emphasis on the power of the feminine in ritual, Foscarina's role as an actress holds added resonance: she is a living embodiment of the transformative power of drama. But though her talent as a performer is exalted throughout the text, Foscarina is not venerated to the same level that Effrena is. In part, this is a natural consequence of the fact that she takes on so much of the labor of exalting Effrena — there is no counterpart who does so exclusively for her. Yet her artistry is celebrated by those in Effrena's intimate circle.

The narrative frequently invokes intoxication as a state of increased productivity or power. However, intoxication in *Il fuoco* generally occurs not through the use of chemical substances such as alcohol or drugs, but through praise, fame, the contemplation of art (as creator, performer, or spectator), intellectual debate, and sex (or the anticipation of it). Gaze is also a powerful source for intoxication, recalling the Greek practice of using large versions of the eyes of Dionysius on ceremonial wine craters. While one member of a symposium attained intoxication through drinking, onlookers could get their fix through the god's own gaze.

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[93] If the presence of the epigraph from *Paradiso* placed directly under the title hadn't already predisposed the reader to have Dante's *Commedia* in mind, the recurring references to Stelio and Foscarina's eye contact, particularly alongside her attentiveness to him, might accomplish this task. The references to enduring architectural characteristics of the surroundings (the panels of porphyry and serpentine, also important for d'Annunzio because of the way they carry sound) also call to mind the physical architecture of the *Inferno*, and how it serves to buttress Dante's flights of narrative fancy.

Terracotta column krater with the image of Bacchus, circa 520-510 B.C.E.

As in Euripides' *Bacchae*, intoxication in *Il fuoco* offers the potential for both productive ritualistic/transcendent outcomes and disastrous outcomes. Both of the texts' presentations of familial love and erotic love are seeded with tension.[94] As an actress, Foscarina aligns with Pentheus' mother Agave as both medium for ritual performance and as "caretaking" figure to Effrena (if not quite "mother"). Stelio bears resemblance both to Dionysius ("lo esaltava in continua lode," "la folla è disposta a ricevere la vostra rivelazione") and to Pentheus ("a chi va verso l'ultimo supplizio").

As an intertextual insert, *Bacchae* is particularly useful for d'Annunzio because it neatly suggests both the poles of the operatic history he seeks to reference: the Florentine Camerata and Wagner. Dionysius has featured prominently in plot references throughout the evolution of opera, both alone and with reference to Orpheus, who is sometimes depicted as his priest. Though Wagner trades heavily on the genealogy of operatic form in his prose works, Euripides does not

[94] This dynamic is transposed somewhat in the second part of the text. There, the most prominent textual incursion is Effrena's forthcoming masterwork (alias, d'Annunzio's *La città morta*). Incest between siblings drives the dramatic action of Effrena/d'Annunzio's drama, as in the case of Siegmund and Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre.*

figure heavily in Wagner's idealized conception of musical drama. However, *Bacchae* occupies a distinct position among the thirty-three Athenian dramas that have survived. As a work performed at the Dionysia that takes as its subject the power of Dionysian rites, *Bacchae*'s metareferential symbolic resonance is particularly fertile ground for elaboration. Diverse components of the Bacchus legend became mainstays of composition in *dramma per musica*'s formative years in Florence and Venice. D'Annunzio will use two of these works in his staged performance scenes in *L'Epifania del Fuoco:* first, selections from Benedetto Marcello's opera *Arianna*, and subsequently, the aria "Lasciatemi morire" from Claudio Monteverdi's *Arianna*.

Bacchante

Intertextual references to Euripides' *Bacchae* also serves as a conduit for the concerns of corporeality and embodiment that are of prime importance in *Il fuoco.* Following in the shadow of Wagner, the artistic form that Stelio deems most vital in this text is multimedia performance. For a writer to succeed via performance, he must have bodies to enact his works onstage.[95] Foscarina is not simply a source of emotional support or erotic attention for Effrena — she is also the physical vessel that will both transform and be transformed by his words. There is a gendered component at play in this representation. In representing artistic creation throughout the text, d'Annunzio, like many authors before him, makes use of those ready-made metaphors of creation and cultivation: pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding, all of which take place only within the female body. In *Il fuoco*, the figure of mother is always symbolically charged,

[95] In the narrative, Andriana Duodo seeks to "risollevar dall'oblio l'*Arianna* di Benedetto Marcello." (D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 27.) In contrast, though books might fall out of popular favor and languish on shelves, they can be discovered at any time and do not generally require patrons to rescue them from oblivion.

partaking in a process of mystery akin to the mysteries of artistic creation. In *Bacchae,* however, the mother figure Agave is both instrument of ritual and bringer of destruction.

Stelio's opening response to Foscarina's flattery betrays his fears of the darker dimensions of Bacchic intoxication: "Volete inebriarmi? [...] Questa è la tazza che si offre a chi va verso l'ultimo supplizio." The conflation of power (artistic, sexual, or otherwise) and death is a strong current throughout *Il fuoco*, and it echoes the power of the intoxicating draught that dealt love and death to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

Treading the boards of the novel

D'Annunzio constructs the first part of *Il fuoco, "*L'Epifania del fuoco" around a series of performances: Effrena's speech at the Palazzo Ducale, a performance of Benedetto Marcello's *Arianna*, a dinner salon attended by Effrena's friends, a sexual encounter between Effrena and Foscarina, and Effrena's tribute of a mass of flowers on the doorstep of the palazzo where Wagner is staying. Each of these performances fleshes out a different dimension of Effrena's character. The reader watches Effrena take shape alongside his artistic collaborator (and eventual romantic companion) Foscarina, his patrons, his audience, his artistic inspiration, and his band of artist friends, from whom he receives support and a forum for debate on the nuances of performance practice. It is here that D'Annunzio stages the introduction of Donatella Arvale to Effrena in real narrative time. Arvale, a singer, becomes an important source of inspiration (sexual and artistic) for Effrena, and readers serve as the audience as Effrena encounters Arvale, first as a disembodied singing voice, then in person. Importantly, in all of the novel, Effrena is never alone for more than a few paragraphs at a time—he is always accompanied, always

performing, always in character. The form of the narration problematizes performance: while descriptions rendered as indirect discourse occasionally dip into the perspectives of both Effrena and Foscarina, dialogue, particularly on the subject of art, drives the first part of the text. Effrena's artistic ambitions are buoyed by conversations, both before and after the first climactic event of the first part: Effrena's allegorical speech at the Palazzo Ducale. This is the first of the performances in the first part of the text, and it is also the performance that most concretely binds d'Annunzio the author to Effrena, his protagonist.

Staging transformation: D'Annunzio and Effrena as Ovid

Foscarina opens the novel, and her first lines begin the promotional campaign for the text's first major performance, Effrena's speech at the Palazzo Ducale:

> – Come sempre – ella soggiunse con la sua voce più dolce – come sempre ogni cosa è favorevole a voi. In una sera come questa, quale anima potrebbe restar chiusa ai sogni che vi piacerà di suscitare con le parole? Non sentite già che la folla è disposta a ricevere la vostra rivelazione?
>
> Ella così blandiva l'amico delicatamente, lo avvolgeva in una continua lusinga, lo esaltava in una continua lode.
>
> – Non era possibile imaginare una festa più magnifica e più insolita per trarre fuori della torre d'avorio un poeta disdegnoso quale voi siete. A voi solo era riserbata questa gioia: di poter comunicare per la prima volta con la moltitudine in un luogo sovrano com'è la Sala del Maggior Consiglio, dal palco dove un tempo il Doge parlava all'adunanza dei patrizii, avendo per fondo il *Paradiso* del Tintoretto e sul capo la *Gloria* del Veronese.[96]

Foscarina here serves as both Effrena's disciple and stage manager, prepping him for his entrance. The rooms of the Palazzo Ducale are characterized not only by their political resonance, but by the artists and artworks that have adorned them. These are not just any

[96] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 7-8.

artworks—each one contains an embedded set of narrative and cultural information. As d'Annunzio begins to build the stage directions for Effrena's forthcoming "revelation" speech to an assembled crowd (its parameters still vague in the narrative at this point), he establishes his protagonist's blocking at the Palazzo Ducale…

…in the theater of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio…

…onstage with Tintoretto's *Gloria del paradiso* behind him…

…and Paolo Veronese's *Trionfo di Venezia* above his head.

With a remarkable economy of language, d'Annunzio conscripts the creators of world masterpieces to serve as the set dressers for his spectacle. This technique has multiple advantages: the proliferation of multiple iterations of a myth, spanning not only time, but also medium, offers a provocative fusion of content and form. Numerous critics comment on d'Annunzio's lengthy stage directions and exacting standards for set dressing; by fixing these elements through prose rather than theater, he has not only an unlimited budget, but unlimited control.[97] In using iconic works of art that are situated in Venice, d'Annunzio also manages to be both local and universal. Finally, though his references may not be familiar to all audiences, a familiarity with D'Annunzio's high art references signals belonging in the poet's particular artistic milieu—his own Venetian Camerata. By employing existing architecture, artworks and their subject matter as his set dressing, d'Annunzio establishes a system of referents that is simultaneously universal and local.

Spectatorship and sponsorship

The opening scene of *Il fuoco* establishes a number of the work's guiding motifs, drawing focus upon the role of the greater atmospheric context of Venice in staging a narrative. Not only are Venice's monuments a recognizable stage for readers, the canal structure of Venice means that it serves as an idealized space in which to explore performance and spectatorship. There is no clatter of horse hooves to dominate the soundscape; the gondolas perform an endless parade; a constant exchange of observation and performance passes between travelers and those on solid

[97] On d'Annunzio's exacting design standards, see: Angioletti, *Il Poeta a Teatro: Gabriele d'Annunzio e la riforma della scena drammatica.* On stage directions, see: Valesio, *Dark Flame*, 82.

ground:

> Passava la bissona regale.
>
> – Ecco quella, delle vostre ascoltatrici, che la Cerimonia vi comanda d'inghirlandare nell'esordio – disse la donna lusinghiera, alludendo alla Regina. – In uno de' vostri primi libri, mi sembra, voi confessate il vostro rispetto e il vostro gusto per i Cerimoniali. Una delle più straordinarie vostre imaginazioni è quella che ha per motivo una giornata di Carlo II di Spagna.
>
> Come la bissona passava presso la gondola, i due fecero atto di salutare. Riconoscendo il poeta di Persephone e la grande attrice tragica, la Regina si volse per un atto spontaneo di curiosità: tutta bionda e rosea, frescamente illuminata da quel suo gran sorriso che pullulava inesauribile spandendosi nei pallidi meandri dei merletti buranesi. Era al suo fianco la patrona di Burano, Andriana Duodo, colei che nella piccola isola industre educava un giardino di refe ove si rinnovellavano stupendemente antichi fiori.[98]

Several important nodes of narrative rise here. First, the narrative's atmospheric concerns: the gliding gondoliers that pass each other on the silent canals. The literary tropes of Venice are known, but this text is one of many that contributed to their establishment—critical attention has not missed the influence of this text on that other paragon of Venetian focus: Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*.[99] But this text is also one that announces the transition of the protagonist and the author's transition from the authors of books to the authors of spectacle. By the time d'Annunzio had begin working on the text of *Il fuoco* in 1895, and certainly by its publication date in 1900, he had begun to dedicate his artistic efforts increasingly toward playwriting. The narrative of *Il fuoco* serves as d'Annunzio's benediction of musical theatrical spectacle as ritual,

[98] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 8-9.

[99] Of the Venetian tropes one could opt to follow in this text, many have selected among a menu of: silence, liminality, death, creation, myth, power, myth, art, political intrigue, religion, sickness, creativity, noise, corruption, decadence, pregnancy, masks, greed, purity, innocence, lies.

and the author's publication record thereafter indicates that his arguments were persuasive upon himself, at the very least.[100]

In outlining the transition of Effrena's "rispetto" and "gusto per le Ceremonie" (capitalization d'Annunzio's), evident in one of the poet's first books, into his present state as the animatore of spectacle/ceremonies in dramatic form, Foscarina draws attention to Effrena's artistic evolution. D'Annunzio has set the stage for poetic triumph, but to make performance happen, he needs someone to fund his productions. That assistance arrives in the form of the queen and her sensitive, artistically oriented companion Andriana Duodo, whose every act holds symbolic poetic resonance. Here, she cultivates flowers from another era; on the subsequent page, Effrena notes her extraordinary sensitivity in the face of art:

> "Un giorno, mentre io l'accompagnavo per le sale dell'Academia, ella si fermò dinanzi alla Strage degli Innocenti del primo Bonifazio (voi ricordate certo il verde della donna abbattuta che il soldato di Erode sta per uccidere: è una nota indimenticabile!); si fermò a lungo, avendo diffusa per tutta la figura la gioia della sensazione piena e perfetta, poi mi disse: "Conducetemi via, Èffrena. Bisogna ch'io lasci gli occhi su quella veste, e non posso più veder altro." Ah, cara amica, non sorridete! Ella era ingenua e sincera parlando così: ella aveva lasciato in realtà i suoi occhi su quel frammento di tela che l'Arte con un po' di colore ha fatto centro d'un mistero indefinitamente gaudioso. E in realtà io conducevo una cieca, tutto compreso di reverenza per quell'anima privilegiata in cui la virtù del colore aveva potuto produrre tale empito da abolire per qualche tempo ogni vestigio della vita ordinaria e da impedire ogni altra comunicazione. Come chiamate voi questo? Riempire il calice fino all'orlo, mi sembra. Ecco, per esempio, quel che io vorrei fare stasera se non fossi scoraggiato."[101]

The courtly Duodo, closely attuned to the aesthetic values of nature, appreciates a spectacle enough to serve as coordinator and stage manager; the queen holds the political and financial power to underwrite the production. Effrena's dreams of publicly resonant ceremony are tied to

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[100] Valesio, *Dark Flame*, xiv-xvi.

[101] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 10.

the dominant political powers of their day. Effrena will later coin the idea of a "trinità dionisiaca," but in this initial section, there are already a trinity of women at work in staging Effrena's theatrical rise: the inspired aesthetic soul, Duodo; the motherly woman of experience, Foscarina; and the woman of power and political force, the queen. As with Effrena's eventual conception of a theatrical trinity (an actress, a singer, a dancer), here, a female trinity is necessary to bring his works to fruition.

The women of taste and power give their salute to the two protagonists, endowing the reader with their public roles during their moment of recognition: "il poeta di Persephone e la grande attrice tragica."[102] At last, the reader knows Foscarina's epithet and profession: tragic actress, perhaps retaining some historical resonance with the "cortigiana declinata" of Venice. These granular dynamics, at work even in these few opening paragraphs, encapsulate the majority of the strategies that both bring this text so closely in alignment with Wagner's aesthetic aspirations and help steer the course of twentieth century literature toward modernism. D'Annunzio's opening *Vorspiel* sets his core set of tactics for the text: he builds a narrative stage with cultural referents from the public imagination (with particular emphasis on Venice's art and architecture), draws attention to the need for embodiment for spectacle to occur, and emphasizes atmospheric sound both external to the human body (the as-yet-silent bells) and internal to it (the heartbeat). He frames all of these dimensions within the necessary sector of cultural patronage.

[102] As is common practice for d'Annunzio throughout his works, in *Il fuoco,* he autocites liberally from both works he had already completed and those he planned to complete. I will expand upon the role of autocitation in detail later in the text, but here it is worth noting that, while there are a few references to a play entitled *Persephone* in d'Annunzio's notes, he never published any work by that name. (Carburlotto, *Il fuoco* notes, 9.)

Performance I: Staging auto-citation

The speech that Foscarina alludes to in the text's opening lines itself toys with multiple narrative modes. It imports a speech given by d'Annunzio himself for the closing of the first Esposizione Internzionale d'Arte di Venezia in 1895, a speech published that same year as *Glosa all'allegoria dell'autunno"frammento di un poema obliato"* and later republished in the Edizione Nazionale as *L'allegoria dell'autunno.*[103] By using Effrena to embody words he had already performed and published, d'Annunzio self-consciously manipulates the presentation of his protagonist, encouraging readers to conflate author and character. Though d'Annunzio uses embedded literary citations liberally throughout *Il fuoco*, he generally gives attribution to any works that are not his own, thus calling attention to his act of pastiche. However, when he self cites, d'Annunzio blurs these boundaries — the readers' perception of these textual incursions depends completely on their knowledge of d'Annunzio's body of work. By blending text practices in this way, d'Annunzio intensifies the cult of the creator—the text opens up in new ways to those who know his works better. As in the case of Wagner, familiarity with the author breeds not contempt, but an enhanced experience of the text. However, by omitting any reference to himself, d'Annunzio never definitively aligns himself with his protagonist, inviting speculation rather than certainty.

Staging his protagonist as the performer of his own speech enables d'Annunzio to meditate out loud on the roles of creator, performer, and audience. The narration in the allegory scene resembles stage directions, but it also often appears to reflect Effrena's mental processes.

[103] Violle, "'L'allégorie de l'automne' dans *Le Feu* de Gabriele d'Annunzio," *L'Automne*, 475.

The reader thus experiences not only the text of the speech, but also the sensations of the performer.

The meandering detail of the speech leads critics such as Violle to proclaim about the speech as a whole, "on a du mal à y percevoir une structure ou, à défaut, une idée central. Il consiste en une série de digressions autour de thèmes censés exalter Venise et l'automne ainsi que le plaisir comme moyen de connaissance. Ces thèmes n'ont *a priori* qu'un faible rapport entre eux. Il faut donc chercher ailleurs ce qui peut faire l'attrait de cette allégorie." [104] But Violle's appraisal misses a crucial node of signification—both the staging minutiae and the speech itself offer a gloss for *Il fuoco* as a meditation on transformation. Importantly, d'Annunzio emphasizes three factors in the transformative power of the speech: the words themselves (published as d'Annunzio's words), Effrena's performance of the words, and finally, the audience's attention.

D'Annunzio mobilizes dynamics of sight, sound, myth, and political history to he stages his auto-performance. Just before Effrena begins to speak, D'Annunzio's narrative elaboration lingers on a component of Effrena's audience, the aristocratic women of Venice in attendance:

> Il mormorio si elevò, si attenuò, cessò mentre egli saliva con passo fermo e leggero i gradini del palco. Volgendosi verso la folla, egli travide con occhi abbagliati il mostro formidabile dagli innumerevoli volti umani fra l'oro e la porpora cupa dell'aula immensa.
>
> Una subitanea sollevazione d'orgoglio lo aiutò a riprendere il dominio di sé stesso. S'inchinò alla Regina e a Donna Andriana Duodo, che gli sorrisero de' loro sorrisi gemelli come sul Canal Grande dalla bissona fuggente. Acuì lo sguardo per riconoscere la Foscarina nello scintillio delle prime file; percorse tutta l'accolta sino al fondo ove non appariva se non una zona oscura cosparsa di vaghe macchie pallide. E allora la moltitudine ammutolita e aspettante gli si presentò a imagine d'una smisurata

[104] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 475-476.

> chimera occhiuta dal busto coperto di scaglie splendide, che s'allungava nereggiando sotto le enormi volute d'un cielo ricco e greve come un pensile tesoro.
>
> Splendidissimo era quel busto chimerico, su cui brillava certo qualche monile che aveva già dato i suoi fochi sotto il medesimo cielo nel convito notturno di una Incoronazione. Il diadema e le collane della Regina – le collane molteplici di perle digradanti in acini di luce che facevano pensare a un miracoloso granire visibile del sorriso imminente – i cupi smeraldi di Andriana Duodo già strappati all'elsa di una scimitarra crudele, i rubini di Giustiniana Memo legati in foggia di garofani dall'inimitabile lavoro di Vettor Camelio, gli zaffiri di Lucrezia Priuli tolti agli alti zoccoli su cui la Serenissima Zilia aveva incesso verso il trono nel giorno del suo trionfo, i berilli di Orsetta Contarini così delicatamente misti all'opaco oro dall'arte di Silvestro Grifo, le turchesi di Zenobia Corner soffuse di non mai veduti pallori dal misterioso male che le aveva mutate una notte sul seno madido della Lusignana tra i piaceri di Asolo: i più insigni gioielli che avevano illustrato le feste secolari della Città anadiomene, tutti s'accendevano di nuovi bagliori su quel busto chimerico donde giungeva a Stelio il tiepido effluvio della pelle e dell'alito femminile. Stranamente maculato il resto del corpo difforme stendevasi indietro, quasi con un prolungamento caudale, passando tra i due giganteschi mappamondi che richiamavano alla memoria dell'Immaginifico le due sfere di bronzo cui il mostro bendato preme con le zampe leonine nell'allegoria del Giambellino. E la vasta vita animale, cieca di pensiero innanzi a colui che solo in quell'ora doveva pensare, dotata di quel fascino inerte che è negli idoli enigmatici, coperta dal suo proprio silenzio come da uno scudo capace di raccogliere e di respingere ogni vibrazione, aspettava il primo fremito dalla parola dominatrice.[105]

D'Annunzio's experience in theatrical practices is well evident in his staging of this scene. It opens first with notes on the ambient atmospheric sound "Il mormorio si elevò, si attenuò, cessò" then gives notes on gesture, "saliva con passo fermo e leggero," "volgendosi," "travide con occhi abbagliati." D'Annunzio then turns his attention to the material world of the theater: props and stage dressing, supplied, in an unusual turn, by the notable jewels worn by a subset of women in the audience. Unexpectedly, the jewels of the audience members offer d'Annunzio the raw materials to build a mythological creature from his audience, one ornamented with history, artistry, natural resources, and power.

[105] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 46-47.

Effrena's speech will hinge upon the abstract representation of Venice as a woman; both the stage directions and the speech anchor this figurative image in reality by making frequent reference to the verifiable architectural and artistic iconography of Venice—Giambellino figures particularly prominently. D'Annunzio's abstract system of symbols depends upon his frequent references to material objects that resist change and are robust in the cultural imagination: buildings, statues, artistic masterpieces, diamonds.[106]

Here, though, d'Annunzio offers a list of characters specific to the text world—the who's who of the Venetian aristocracy present at Effrena's speech. D'Annunzio does a great deal of listing in *Il fuoco*, but the references are virtually always real. This is the only time he lists a group of text-world characters and, with the exception of the Queen and Andriana Duodo (who appear in the opening scene), the rest of the women in this passage appear in the text only during this scene. Each woman is branded twice, both by her name and her adornment, but it is their unified mass that will serve the symbolic role as spectator, the "mostro" of public opinion that Effrena will conquer. So why bother to name them here? Their adornments seem a clue. Earlier, in the lead-up to the speech. Effrena's friend Francesco de Lizio links the women's jewels with artistic recognition and the Venetian political lineage, "la Regina, se ama i tuoi libri, stasera porta al collo tutte le sue perle. Tu avrai dinanzi a te un roveto di gemme: tutti i gioielli ereditarii del patriziato veneto." [107] The queen's jewels are thus already established in their relation to the

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[106] Dante echoes prominently in these tactics—by seeding the *Inferno* with a restricted set of extremely precise architectural descriptions, Dante provides the illusion of solidity amidst a whirl of abstract and fantastical imagery. The author's tendency towards long lists of nouns also has the potential to affect the physical dynamics of the reading experience. Research increasingly shows that even silent reading often follows the breath constraints of reading out loud—long sentences with many small breaks increase the tendency toward losing one's breath (or one's attention).

[107] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 42.

Venetian political lineage. As Stelio prepares to speak, in fulfillment of Lizio's projection, d'Annunzio opens his descriptive stage directions with the presence of the queen's diadem and pearls.

The characteristic jewels of the queen and Andriana, whom d'Annunzio has already situated in their performative political roles, evoke moments of power respectively benevolent and cruel ("acini di luce che facevano pensare a un miracoloso granire visibile del sorriso imminente", "strappati all'elsa di una scimitarra crudele"), but the gems of the other women are each identified by their relations to important historical artists or moments. Each woman is characterized, then, by her adornment with a precious natural resource, one transformed into historical artifact by artistic talent or political association. If readers miss the meaning of this transformation, d'Annunzio spells it out later via Stelio's spoken performance:

> "Era per giungere! La coppa invertita del cielo versava su tutte le cose un flutto di splendore che sembrò da prima ai miei occhi incredibile, tanto la sua qualità superava di ricchezza pur le più ricche illuminazioni interiori del pensiero inspirato o del sogno involontario. Come una materia siderale, di natura sconosciuta e mutevole, in cui fossero figurate a miriadi imagini d'un fluido mondo indistinte, dalle quali un perpetuo fremito con una vicenda di distruzioni e di creazioni stupendamente facili traesse un'armonia sempre novella, così appariva l'acqua. Tra le due meraviglie la pietra multiforme e multanime come una selva e come un popolo, – quella smisurata congerie muta da cui il genio dell'Arte estrasse i concetti occulti della Natura, su cui il tempo accumulò i suoi misteri e la gloria incise i suoi segni, per le cui vene ascese l'umano spirito verso l'Ideale come la linfa ascende verso il fiore per le fibre degli alberi – la pietra multanime e multiforme assumeva d'attimo in attimo espressioni di vita così intense e nuove che veramente parve distrutta per lei la legge e la sua inerzia originale irradiarsi d'una miracolosa sensibilità." [108]

The symbolic fluidity of reality is a clichéd Venetian trope, and the density and length of d'Annunzio's sentences redoubles the sense of being adrift amidst symbols and clauses. But the

[108] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 55.

importance of artistic genius in transforming nature shines through: all nouns related to this process are capitalized for easier communication for readers than a listener might have: “Arte”, “Natura”, “Ideale.” But the enduring jewels are not only transformed by craftsmanship or historical association: Effrena’s speech itself transforms them. When the aristocratic women return at the midpoint of Effrena’s speech for the last time, the jewels serve as a conduit for his symbolic message. Notably, the jewels and the women are transformed simultaneously by the allegory of the body of Venice the city, who resembles them; by the heartbeat of the crowd, which surrounds them; and by the breath of Effrena’s speech:

> “ “Con che passione palpitando nelle sue mille cinture verdi e sotto i suoi immensi monili la Città bella si abbandonò al dio magnifico’”
> [...] Il palpito della folla e la voce del poeta sembravano rendere alle mura secolari la vita primiera e rinnovellar nel freddo museo lo spirito originario: un nucleo d’idee possenti, concretate e organate nelle sostanze più durevoli a testimoniare la nobilità d’una stirpe.
>
> Lo splendore d’una giovinezza divina scendeva su le donne, come in un’alcova suntuosa; poiché esse avevano sentito in loro l’ansietà dell’attesa e la voluttà dell’abbandonarsi, come la Città bella. Sorridevano con un vago languore, quasi estenuate da una sensazione troppo forte, emergendo con le spalle nude dalle loro corolle di gemme. Gli smeraldi d’Andriana Duodo, i rubini di Giustiniana Memo, gli zaffiri di Lucrezia Priuli, i berilli di Orsetta Contarini, le turchesi di Zenobia Corner, tutti i gioielli ereditarii ne’ cui fuochi era più che il pregio della materia come nel decoro della grande aula era più che il pregio dell’arte, parevano mettere su i bianchi volti delle patrizie il riflesso d’una gioconda e invereconda vita anteriore, quasi risvegliando in esse e dall’imo risollevando per virtù segrete l’anima delle voluttuarie che avevano offerto agli amori una carne macerata nei bagni di mirra di muschio d’ambra e scoperto in publico le mammelle colorite di belletto.[109]

From their initial appearance, d’Annunzio presents the jeweled aristocratic women as a chimera, subsuming individual identities into the image of the mythical beast. This “mostro” is powerful in its resurrection because it represents the necessary spectator—Effrena must have a witness in

[109] D’Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 57.

order to experience the transformation of the crowd. What better spectator than one whose collective jewels have been singled out as representing the artistic, political, and genealogical record of Venice? Venice's women of singular stature become the enduring, disindividuated spectator. Here, Effrena links them explicitly with the city proper, the woman Venice as protagonist of his speech. This series of transformations (precious stones transformed into ornament by art/action, their material nature transforming women into a pulsing imaginary form, transformed by the words of the poet into a symbolic, anthropomorphosized Venice) is emblematic of the type of work d'Annunzio does throughout the text—he consistently forces the issue of transformation in unexpected directions, not simply gesturing toward a change in shape, but a giving of new lives.

As much as Effrena's speech is intended to transform his audience, the metamorphosis is reciprocal. He is transformed by the gaze of the audience at large, by the gaze of Foscarina in particular, and by his own words. An allegorical tale—a speech introducing a performance of Benedetto Marcello's opera—becomes a manifesto. In the opening of his speech, Effrena refers to the "nuziale alleanza dell'Autunno e di Venezia sotto i cieli" as an "intimo spettacolo," and perhaps this is the productive lens through which one could view *Il fuoco*.[110] Though the narrative privileges performance, the intimate spectacle is the rite co-created by d'Annunzio and the reader.

Effrena's performance of d'Annunzio's allegory on Venice's symbolic marriage is interspersed with play-by-play commentary on the reactions of both the exalting crowd and the exalted Effrena. One might well feel the weight of Dante here as well—whereas *Vita Nuova*

[110] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 46-47.

quilts together patches of Dante's "autobiography", poetry, and literary analysis, here, d'Annunzio weaves the strands of autobiography, prose, and commentary together into a continuous fabric. D'Annunzio's narrative frame for his own words places the spectator/ performer relationship at center stage, simultaneously emphasizing images of the chimera (the disindividuated mass of powerful women) and the chosen woman, Foscarina, whose gaze anchors Effrena's performance. Though she is the performer by trade, in this case, she performs spectatorship. Unadorned and with bare shoulders, raised into the celestial bodies of the painted zodiac signs behind her, her eyes, like those of Dante's Beatrice, help to sustain the poet's rise. The soundscape into which Effrena's voice rings out is established both by silence and by the rhythm of oars, reaffirming once again the power of Venice as setting, both in the realm of symbolism and reality effect. The opening of Effrena's speech precisely echoes d'Annunzio's stylistic choices in *Il fuoco*: it is staged by sounds and sights of Venice's physical locations (Giardini, riva degli Schiavoni), lit by allegory (Belleza infinito, Autunno e Venezia), and drawn in explicit parallel to the "spettacolo" of the mind. Finally, it ends with a sexual metaphor.

> "Seduta su la sponda, in aspetto di deità, Venezia riceve l'anello dal giovine dio pampinifero disceso nell'acqua, mentre la Bellezza si libra nell'aria a volo con un serto di stelle per coronare l'alleanza meravigliosa.
>
> "Guardate il naviglio lontano! Sembra che rechi un annunzio. Guardate i fianchi della Donna simbolica! Sono capace di portare il germe d'un mondo."
>
> [...]
>
> Esalavano essi la loro ebrietà nel grido verso colui che aveva offerto alle loro labbra sitibone la coppa del suo vino. Tutti vedevano ormia la fiamma inestinguibile a traverso il velo dell'acqua.[111]

And the crowd goes wild.

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[111] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 73-74.

Performance II: Variations on a theme by Ovid

Effrena leaves the room after he is finished speaking, moving directly from his sojourn as performer to his role as listener, as Marcello's *Arianna* begins in an adjacent room. Marcello's opera forms a part of the *Bacchus* lineage, which, again, places transformation in a central role. By layering multiple iterations of this drama, across media, d'Annunzio places the sights, sounds, and words of this legacy into conversation with each other, highlighting the multimedia dimensions of his prose project. Rather than taking up the dangerous side of Dionysian ritual, however, here d'Annunzio employs several works that speak to a gentler legend of the god: his union with Ariadne/Arianna after she is abandoned by Theseus. Monteverdi's libretto, written by Ottavio Rinuccini, the first great lyricist of the operatic tradition[112] draws in part on Ovid's account of Ariadne's transformation in Book Eight of his *Metamorphoses.* After being abandoned by Theseus, Ariadne:

> wept and wailed in her lonely plight,
> till Bacchus swept her up in his arms and came to her rescue.
> 'My star,' he declared, 'you must shine for ever!' Removing the crown
> from her forehead, he launched it skyward. It whirled and spin through the air,
> and during its flight the gems were changed into brilliant fires,
> coming to rest once more in the shape of a jeweled circlet
> between the Kneeler and bright Ophiucus, who holds the snake."[113]

In Ovid, Ariadne's celestial transformation stages the providential aspects of Bacchus' powers, rather than their dangers. The apotheosis of Arianna is a crucial part of Marcello's telling of the story, as well. In Marcello's finale, Bacco, the chorus, and Fedra, Arianna's onetime rival, all honor her forthcoming transformation:

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[112] Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 40.

[113] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 302-303.

BACCO Questo corona istessa
T'ornerà il crine in cielo;
e con forme più belle
si cangeran le gemme
in tante stelle. [...]

CORO Serro di stelle lucide
ad Arianna cinga
le tempie illustri e nobili
che con eterno lume
golgoreggiar si veda. [...]

FEDRA E di più popoli
concordi cantici
al suon festeggino
de' loro nomi
annoverati fra semidei.[114]

The blended system of references to Bacchus is complicated in one final degree by the fact that the performance of Marcello's *Arianna* will take place under precisely choreographed circumstances. Andriana Duodo, seeking to recreate the type of intimate aristocratic affair that launched the *dramma per musica* tradition in Florence:

> Guidata da quel gusto della magnificenza antica, che si conserva in lei così largo, ha preparato una festa veramente dogale nel palazzo dei Dogi, a imitazione di quelle che si celebravano sul finire del Cinquecento. Ella ha pensato a risollevar dall'oblio l'Arianna di Benedetto Marcello e a farla sospirare nel luogo medesimo ove il Tintoretto ha dipinto la Minoide in atto di ricevere da Afrodite la corona di stelle.[115]

Like the masterpieces that deck the stage for Stelio's speech, Tintoretto's 1577 painting both serves as backdrop for the work and enters into a visual dialogue with it. The transformation of jewelry into a lasting legacy, as depicted in Ovid, Marcello, and Tintoretto, also speaks to the transformation of the aristocratic women in the previous scene of Effrena's speech. Here we have

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[114] Marcello and Cassani, *Arianna,* 137-139.

[115] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 27.

a definitive prototype of a total artwork in prose: a concrete visual referent, mythological referent, literary referent, and dramatico-musical referent, all conjured simultaneously for the attentive reader.

Jacopo Tintoretto, *Lo sposalizio di Bacco e Arianna alla presenza di Venere,*1576-1577.

Though all of the dimensions of Effrena's performance hinged upon the transformation that happens through the visual interchange between performer and audience, Effrena is not initially present in the room when Marcello's *Arianna* is performed. When the symphony begins, Effrena hears it as an intertextual reference before the words begin:

> A celebrar quell'immagine gli giunsero dall'aula prossima le prime note della Sinfonia di Benedetto Marcello, il cui movimento fugato rivelava sùbito il carattere del grande stile. Un'idea sonora, nitida e forte come una persona vivente, sviluppavasi secondo la misura della sua potenza. Ed egli riconobbe in quella musica la virtù di quel principio medesimo intorno a cui, come intorno a un tirso, egli aveva avvolto le ghirlande della sua poesia.[116]

[116] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 74-75.

In this blending of music and text and drama, Effrena is not in communion with the crowd, but "solo tra simulacri candidi e muti," the sculptures of the gallery. Nonetheless, he sees Arianna's "corona di stelle," just as described by Andriana Duodo. D'Annunzio frames this encounter, too, as transformation. Here, his *vision* is transformed by hearing from afar the sounds of Marcello's drama. Synesthetic blending of art references is one of the most potent possibilities of this type of text construction.

Throughout the *Arianna* performance, d'Annunzio alternates between using verbal descriptions of the music as it is performed, lyrics as a stand-in for sung passages of music, and symbolic Bacchic imagery that re-centers the Euripidean *Bacchae* against the performance of the Ovidian "Bacchus and Ariadne" narrative. This results in a curious mosaic of symbols, with theatrical dimensions mostly likely overtaking the musical dimensions for the reader. *Arianna* is a particularly obscure intertext,[117] but d'Annunzio nonetheless includes its lyrics as shorthand for their musical content. Lyrics can be used as an effective stand-in for famous passages of sung music, but *"Come mai puoi / vedermi piangere"* alone is probably not enough to spark involuntary musical memory for most readers. In this case, what could be a concrete reference most likely becomes becomes a set of words of ambiguous symbolic and musical import. D'annunzio intensifies this blended construction further by conflating the Euripidean Dionysian element with these referents:

> Un preludio di violini salì allora nel silenzio favorevole. Le viole e i violoncelli unirono a quel ploro supplice un sospiro più profondo. Non era, dopo il flauto frigio e il crotalo berecintio, dopo gli stromenti orgiaci i cui suoni turbano la ragione ed incitano al delirio, non era l'augusta lira dorica, grave e soave, armonico fulcro del canto? Tale dal Ditirambo strepitoso la natività del Drama. La grande metamorfosi del rito dionisiaco —

[117] Knighton, "Marcello: *Arianna,*" *Gramophone*.

> la frenesia della festa sacra convertita nel creatore entusiasmo della tragedia — pareva figurata in quella vicenda musicale. Il soffio igneo del dio tracio aveva dato vita a una forma sublime dell'Arte.[118]

This passage may not conjure up any musical imagery for a listener, but it does a thorough job at evoking dramatic tension. This is a useful sleight of hand for d'Annunzio—by using an opera with a familiar narrative but likely unfamiliar music, he can suggest the presence of a work that is fully formed without presenting a complete whole (that is, lyrics are given, but they are unlikely to conjure a musical referent). This mediating technique will be helpful as d'Annunzio attempts to stage Effrena's own (fictional and silent) musical creation in the second half of the drama. If this weren't enough spectacle, the scene closes with the immense "spettacolo allucinante" of a fireworks display, "L'Epifania del Fuoco" itself, which crowns Effrena's artistic intoxication with stagecraft worthy not only of opera, but of soap opera.

Performance III: Effrena's Camerata, metamorphosis as manifesto

D'Annunzio stages all of the first part of the text as a series of diverse forms of performance, and the performances at the Palazzo Ducale are swiftly followed by another performative genre that will reign in all three of the novels I treat in this project: the salon. The closest possible corollary to the origins of the modern European musical drama, Effrena's Venetian Camerata recapitulates a theme that Wagner's theoretical writings leave almost comically mute. D'Annunzio's staging of a dinner party populated by young Italian art and culture enthusiasts offers him the ideal opportunity to correct Wagner's historical omissions and

[118] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 80.

interrogate his missteps. Staging manifesto as a conversation is a neat Socratic trick, as it enables Effrena an opening to debunk any opposing viewpoints in a particularly virtuosic manner.

> — Non ammirate l'opera di Riccardo Wagner ? — gli chiese Donatella Arvale con un leggero corrugar dei sopraccigli, che per un attimo rese quasi duro il suo volto ermetico. [...]
>
> L'opera di Riccardo Wagner — egli rispose — è fondata su lo spirito germanico, è d'essenza puramente settentrionale. La sua riforma ha qualche analogia con quella tentata da Lutero. Il suo drama non è se non il fiore supremo del genio d'una stirpe, non è se non il compendio straordinariamente efficace delle aspirazioni che affaticarono l'anima dei sinfoneti e dei poeti nazionali, dal Bach al Beethoven, dal Wieland al Goethe. Se voi imaginaste la sua opera su le rive del Mediterraneo, tra i nostri chiari olivi, tra i nostri lauri svelti, sotto la gloria del cielo latino, la vedreste impallidire e dissolversi. Poiché — secondo la sua stessa parola — all'artefice è dato di veder risplender della perfezione futura un mondo ancora informe e di gioirne profeticamente nel desiderio e nella speranza, io annunzio l'avvento d'un'arte novella o rinnovellata che per la semplicità forte e sincera delle sue linee, per la sua grazia vigorosa, per l'ardore de' suoi spiriti, per la pura potenza delle sue armonie, continui e coroni l'immenso edifizio ideale della nostra stirpe eletta. Io mi glorio d'essere un latino ; e — perdonatemi, o sognante Lady Myrta, perdonatemi, o delicato Hoditz — riconosco un barbaro in ogni uomo di sangue diverso. [...] — Nulla è più lontano dall'Orestiade quanto la tetralogia dell'Anello. Penetrarono assai più profondamente l'essenza della tragedia greca i Fiorentini di Casa Bardi, Omaggio alla Camerata del Conte di Vernio![119]

While Wagner had to publish works on the side of his operas to elucidate his artistic philosophies, the all-encompassing potential of the novel form enables d'Annunzio to test and assert philosophical ideas via staged dialogue. D'Annunzio uses this group dialogue format to addresses Wagner's blindspot for works of the Camerata de' Bardi. When one of the men of the studio notes that he always thought the Camerata "fosse un'adunanza oziosa di eruditi e di retori," Effrena has the opportunity to respond with particular fervor:

> Nel discorso preposto alla *Rappresentazione di Anima et di Corpo* Emilio del Cavaliere espone intorno alla formazione del teatro novello le medesime idee che furono attuate a Bayreuth, compresi i precetti del perfetto silenzio, dell'orchestra invisibile e dell'ombra

[119] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 104-105.

> favorevole. Marco da Gagliano, nel celebrare lo spettacolo di festa, fa Telogio di tutte le arti che vi concorrono "di maniera che con l'intelletto vien lusingato in uno stesso tempo ogni sentimento pili nobile dalle piti dilettevoli arti ch'abbia ritrovato l'ingegno umano." Non basta? [120]

As Effrena reclaims the modern innovations of operatic form for both the Florentine Camerata and opera's early public history in Venice, Claudio Monteverdi, "il più grande degli innovatori," "un'anima eroica, di pura essenza italiana" also figures prominently. Effrena suggests to Donatella Arvale that she help Monteverdi speak in his own voice, and she sings the aria "*Lasciatemi morire*!" from Monteverdi's Bacchic *Arianna.* D'Annunzio employs the opening of this aria to insert another pivotal intertext from Italian cultural history:

> Lasciatemi morire!
>
> D'un tratto, le anime furono rapite da un potere che parve l'aquila fulminea da cui Dante nel sogno fu rapito insino al fuoco. Esse ardevano insieme nella sempiterna verità, udivano la melodia del mondo passare a traverso la loro estasi luminosa.
>
> Lasciatemi morire![121]

Dante always has a seat at the table when claims for Italian cultural supremacy are being made, but this is a particularly useful intertext: it features multiple dimensions of perception and interpretation.[122] Like the opening citation, however, it speaks to power of the will in attaining greatness, using fire as a metaphor. Though Arvale's voice leaves Monteverdi's aria "nel ricordo come un lineamento immutabile" in the minds of the attendees, the conversation turns once again to Wagner, to *Parsifal* in particular.

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[120] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 106.

[121] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 108.

[122] From canto 9 of *Purgatorio*, this scene is a dream experienced by Dante; Virgil explains its meaning to him when he wakes up. (Alighieri, *II*, 9.1-9.33.)

> Una specie di rancore istintivo, una oscura ostilità che non era d'intelletto, lo sollevava avverso quel Germano pertinace ch'era riuscito a infiammare di sé il mondo. Per ottener la vittoria su gli uomini e su le cose, anche colui non aveva fatto se non esaltar la sua imagine e magnificare il suo proprio sogno di bellezza dominatrice. Anche colui era andato alla folla come alla preda preferibile. Anche colui aveva posto a sua disciplina lo sforzo di sorpassar se medesimo, senza tregua. E ora egli aveva il tempio del suo culto, su la collina bàvara.[123]

Spurred by the force of jealousy and still lost in thought of Arvale's performance of Monteverdi, Effrena, increasingly referred to in the text not by name, but as "l'animatore," conceptualizes his own Dionysian trinity and his work as a whole: "L'attrice, la cantatrice, la danzatrice, le tre donne dionisiache, gli apparivano come gli strumenti perfetti e quasi divini delle sue finzioni. Con una incredibile celerità, nella parola nel canto nel gesto nella sinfonia la sua opera s'integrava e viveva d'una vita oltrepossente dinanzi alla moltitudine soggiogata."[124] The salon scene keeps the tension between Effrena's inspiration and discouragement at a continuously high pitch. No sooner is his work taking shape, then Effrena learns that Wagner is in Venice: "il suo spirito era trascinato violentemente nell'orbita del mondo creato dal dio germano [...] il creatore barbaro." He looks at Foscarina, in whose eyes he seems to hear the words of Kundry: "Servire, servire!" [125]

What is particularly interesting about the presence of Wagner in the Camerata scene is how transparent and virulent Effrena's jealousy of him is, even in absentia. A sense of gratuitous cruelty dominates d'Annunzio's presentation of Wagner in the text, as it does for Effrena's interactions with Foscarina; in both cases, the characters' declining physical bodies are a

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[123] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 114.

[124] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 116.

[125] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco,* 122. A reference to Kundry in Wagner's *Parsifal*.

particular site of derision. While Effrena appears to attain power and confidence through his own performances in the narrative (both onstage and in the intellectual and erotic encounters thereafter), a crippling anxiety prevails thereafter. The desecration of the bodies of Foscarina and Wagner seems the only sure path through which he (perhaps this "he" is d'Annunzio as well) bolsters his creative strength.

Performance IV: "Questo è il mio corpo"

Effrena and Foscarina's first sexual encounter comes directly on the heels of the Camerata event. Effrena is by turns overwhelmed with desire and shockingly cold in his approach to his forthcoming erotic interlude. D'Annunzio's predilection for staging intense erotic encounters is well known, but here, two particular passages stand of special note. First, Effrena's fantasies of Foscarina, as they negotiate their encounter, are of the darker Dionysian variety—with cruelty and violence present in far stronger measure than affection:

> Il suo desiderio fu insano e smisurato, contenne il fremito delle moltitudini vinte e l'ebrezza degli amanti ignoti e la visione delle promiscuità orgiache ; fu fatto di crudeltà, di rancore, di gelosia, di poesia e di orgoglio. Lo punse il rammarico di non aver mai posseduta l'attrice dopo nn trionfo scenico, ancora calda dell'alito popolare, coperta di sudore, ansante e smorta, con i vestigi dell'anima tragica che aveva pianto e gridato in lei, con le lacrime di quell'anima intrusa ancora umide sul viso convulso. Egli la vide in un lampo riversa, piena della potenza che aveva strappato l'urlo al mostro, palpitante come la Menade dopo la danza, assetata e stanca ma bisognosa d'essere presa, d'essere scossa, di contrarsi in un nltimo spasimo, di ricevere il seme violento, per placarsi alfine in un sopore senza sogni.[126]

[126] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 124.

Later, when plans for their encounter are set, Foscarina frames her "gift" of her body to Effrena using Christian iconography, adapted to accommodate Effrena's personal symbol, the pomegranate:

> La donna si chinò a raccogliere su l'erba la melagrana. Era matura, s'era aperta cadendo, versava il succo sanguigno; che bagnò la mano arida, macchiò la chiara veste. Con la visione della barca onusta e dell'isola pallida e della prateria d'asfodelo, tornarono allo spirito amante le parole dell'animatore: " Questo è il mio corpo.... Prendete e mangiate!"
> — Ebbene?
> — Sì. Ella strinse il frutto nel pugno, con un moto d'istinto, come se volesse spremerlo. L' umore stillò, le rigò il polso. Tutto il suo corpo allora si contorse e vibrò intorno a un nucleo di fuoco, chiedendo di soggiacere. Di nuovo, il fiume gelido la sommergeva, le passava sopra, l'assiderava dalle radici dei capelli all'estremità delle dita, ma senza spegnere quel nucleo ardente.[127]

Though d'Annunzio does not shy away from presenting graphic sexual encounters in the second part, here, he breaks off, and Foscarina returns to the party, "verso le voci dei poeti che avevano esaltata la sua potenza ideale."[128] The couple has made plans to see each other after everyone has left, but the reader rejoins Foscarina the morning after. She is not luxuriating in the afterglow. "Perduta, perduta, ella era ormai perduta. Ella viveva ancora, disfatta, umiliata e ferita, come se fosse stata calpesta senza pietà." [129] The unvarnished aggression with which d'Annunzio seems to portray this encounter is jarring. Even without autobiographical incursions, Foscarina and Effrena are artistic colleagues entering into a long-awaited sexual relationship; one might expect them to have a bit more fun in their inaugural encounter. With respect to the narrative's autobiographical resonance, the sexual dynamics between the two are rather ludicrous. Duse was

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[127] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 130.

[128] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 130.

[129] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 131.

only four years older than d'Annunzio, but Foscarina is portrayed as a woman much older (perhaps twenty years) than her young, ultravirile lover. Moreover, as both Duse and d'Annunzio seemed to view each other artistic equals, one might anticipate a some collegial exchange instead of outright servitude and debasement. Wagner demonstrated erotic scandal need not end one's career, but actively courting a scandal where there needed be none might be a d'Annunzian addition to the project.

Performance V: An early grave

In the vigorous debate about Wagner's innovations during the salon scene, one of Effrena's friends finally yells out to him "Basta! Il barbaro è vinto!" But what leaves even more of an impression than the group's philosophical burying of Wagner is Wagner appearance in the text as a character. The power of the Wagnerian legacy is such that simply conjuring his name is enough to let his image rise. This is, of course, true of all of the individuals and works that d'Annunzio drops into the narrative, but as Wagner is preeminent among these, his presence is particularly intense, as is the foreshadowing of what is to come.

After leaving his initial sexual encounter with Foscarina, Effrena is particularly invigorated, but his first stop is to toss flowers at the doorstep of the Palace Vendramin-Calergi, where Wagner is staying. Though ostensibly offered as a gesture of respect in practice, it feels like a death memorial. Effrena ends the first part inspired, famished, sailing out into the new light. Both his sexual encounter with Foscarina and his tossed token to the failing Wagner buoy Effrena's spirits and his artistic prospects. These are both his collaborators, and while he makes

use of both of them (Foscarina for performance and inspiration, Wagner for structural innovation), Effrena's heroic narrative means that he must leave both of them behind.

"L'impero di silencio"

Giorgione, *Vecchia*, 1506.

In the second part of the novel, Foscarina's voice is again the first to enter the narrative stage, and her words once again set the tone and style for the part. She is accompanied once again by Effrena, but here, instead of building up Effrena for his performance, she intones "Col tempo," while in the process of contemplating a painting of in the Accademia: *Vecchia*.[130] The painting's theme leads Foscarina to launch into the first allegory: the story of a countess who shut herself away from the world rather than allow her fading beauty to be witnessed by the public.

In the event that the importance of this allegorical detail in the narrative were unclear, d'Annunzio uses Foscarina to announce its presence:

> Indovinate il nome. È bello e raro, come se voi l'aveste ricercato.
> – Non so.
> – Radiana! Si chiama Radiana, la prigioniera.
> – Ma di chi è prigioniera?
> – Del Tempo, Stelio. Il Tempo veglia alle porte con la sua falce e col suo polverino, come nelle vecchie stampe…

[130] Carburlotto notes that, though d'Annunzio attributes *Vecchia* to Torbido, since 1903, the painting has been attributed to Giorgione. (Carburlotto, *Il fuoco* notes, 143.)

– Un'allegoria?[131]

Corporeality and artistry dominate the content of all of the parables d'Annunzio employs in this part, and the parables often build upon one another: Effrena, glorifying a greyhound's status as natural predator, draws a relationship between it and Foscarina. Almost immediately thereafter, Lady Myrta shares the story of a woman, Jeanne d'Elbeuf who died after seeing a rabbit hurt by her horse; Foscarina, is soon thereafter lost in a labyrinth. If the first part of the novel stages the audience as spectator in the action, the second part invites the reader to do the work of building spectacle alongside Effrena. By constantly engaging readers in the process of textual interpretation, d'Annunzio encourages active participation in elaborating the text's artistic vision. This practical dimension will be vital to d'Annunzio's success in gaining reader buy-in for staging the final dimension of his operatic masterpiece, the dimension that is completely absent: music.

Motive: "L'arco ha per nome BIOS e per opera la morte"

One prominent feature in literary criticism that draws upon the Wagnerian legacy is the tendency to classify repeated verbal phrases as motivic. There are some inherent complications in this classification. Musical phrases always exist within a system of harmonic positioning, and while different traditions divide the musical scale using different terms or different sets of note divisions, all music that uses tones work in some way with these scales. Though the conventions guiding the interpretation of these relationships vary by culture, the relationships between notes

[131] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 148.

themselves do not. Musical tones exist in nature, humans simply cultivated the language to be able to talk about them.

In Wagnerian motival development, musical phrases are introduced to signal ideas, characters, or dynamics. When these phrases recur later in the work, spectators draw upon their previous knowledge with the musical idea as they confront its next iteration. Part of the innovation inherent in Wagner's use of motifs is that they evolve through their iterations — changes in rhythm, modality, or elaboration are the norm. But even without these internal evolutions, motifs evolve just in reference to their placement within the musical setting in which they are embedded, as these settings exert different harmonic pressures on the notes the motifs contain. Letters and words (whichever we wish to view as the base unit of measure of language) do not have the same innate relationships as notes—as the inventions of culture they are irrevocably tied to cultural usage. Analogies between letters/words/phrases and musical notes are thus always complicated by this dynamic.

However, many writers in the wake of Wagner do use repeated phrases to invoke some sensation of return, chorus, or motive. This, of course, isn't unique to writers following Wagner, but in the case of those who are, it often as a shorthand for musical motif. D'Annunzio uses several distinctive phrases in the text twice,[132] but "L'arco ha per nome BIOS e per opera la morte" appears three times at the narrative's dramatic high points. The first two of these, it appears in the narration, in what appears to be the mind of Effrena: first when Effrena is pondering the sickness of Donatella Arvale's father in anticipation of his first sexual encounter

[132] These are: "Servire! Servire!" ; "straziante dolcezza di quel novembre" ; "col tempo" ; and "il gran cuore malato" (which is used four times).

with Foscarina;[133] next, when Foscarina, distraught, offers to call Arvale for Effrena after one of their erotic encounters;[134] and finally, as Effrena and Foscarina are traveling, he speaks it aloud, expressing about it:

> La udivo di continuo entro di me, quando ero seduto alla tua tavola, in quella notte d'autunno, nell'Epifania del Fuoco. Ebbi un'ora di vita veramente dionisiaca, un'ora di delirio chiuso ma terribile come se io contenessi la montagna incendiata dove urano e si divincolano le Tìadi. Veramente mi pareva di udire, ora sì e ora no, clamori e canti e le grida di una strage lontana. E mi stupivo di rimanere immobile, e il senso della mia immobilità corporea aumentava la mia frenesia profonda. E non vedevo più nulla fuorché la tua figura che a un tratto era divenuta bellissima, e nella tua figura la forza di tutte le tue anime e, dietro, anche i paesi e le moltitudine. [...] Con una incredibile celerità nella parola nel canto nel gesto nella sinfonia la mia opera s'integrò e visse d'una tal vita che, se io riescissi a infonderne pur una parte nelle forme che voglio esprimere, veramente potrei infiammare di me il mondo. [...] Esprimere! ecco la necessità. La più alta visione non ha alcun valore se non è manifestata e condensata in forme viventi. E io ho tutto da creare. Io non verso la mia sostanza in impronte ereditate. La mia opera è d'invenzione totale.[135]

In the repetition of this phrase, anchored in moments of heightened dramatic tension, d'Annunzio returns again and again of the inherent human mortality—this is closer to the function of a choral refrain.

Mortality is the central component of the depictions of the two figures in the text who take a full share in Effrena's power as artistic creators: Foscarina and Richard Wagner. D'Annunzio spends a good deal of time reinforcing the artistic powers of these two figures, but as if to demonstrate that there can only be one artistic prophet, as Effrena's artistic motivations surge in "l'impero di silencio", the creative potential of these bodies within the narrative is

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[133] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 122.

[134] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 167.

[135] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 319-320.

sacrificed with ritualistic relish.[136] Though their depictions both contain elements of fiction, both Foscarina and Wagner are characters that anchor the text to the realities of performing bodies: the composer/conductor (Wagner himself) and the concealed actress (Duse). D'Annunzio's treatment of their bodies is particularly charged. Foscarina bears the weight of being Effrena's medium—in surpassing her, Effrena can present the grandness of his vision. Wagner occupies the position of prophet, one who must be overturned by both Effrena (within the narrative world) and d'Annunzio (in the reader's world).

Agave, Beatrice, Kundry, Foscarina: The eternal feminine

Foscarina's portrayal within the novel often depicts her artistic agency as a tribute to Effrena's genius. Even though it is her voice that opens the narrative, from Foscarina's first lines, d'Annunzio frames her talent as a performer as subordinate to Effrena's artistry. Her body may serve as medium, but his message animates it.[137]

> Ben lo sapeva colei ch'egli chiamava Perdita ; e, come la creatura pia attende dal Signore l'aiuto soprannaturale per operare la sua salvazione, ella pareva attendere eh' egli la ponesse alfine nello stato di grazia necessario per elevarsi e per rimanere in tal fuoco, verso di cui ella era spinta da un folle desiderio di ardere e di struggersi disperata d'aver perduto fin l'ultimo vestigio della sua giovinezza e paurosa di ritrovarsi sola in un deserto cinereo.[138]

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[136] Scrivano, "Il teatro in prosa, prima degli anni francesi: aspetto letterario e drammaturgico," *D'Annunzio e il teatro in italia fra ottocento e novecento,* 21. Interestingly, the singing muse Donatella Arvale remains unscathed in *Il fuoco*. In the projected third installment of the series, however, d'Annunzio planned for Foscarina murder her.

[137] Even Effrena's nickname for Foscarina, "Perdita," suggests loss and shame more than affection.

[138] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 19.

However, though some of Foscarina's performances might necessarily await Effrena's artistic output, she nonetheless plays an important role in their creation.[139] After intoning one of Demeter's speeches from Effrena's *Persephone,*[140] the author notes her role in the work's genesis:

> — Ah, Perdita, come sapete diffondere l'ombra su la vostra voce ! — interruppe il poeta, sentendo una notte armoniosa ottenebrare le sillabe dei suoi versi.
> — Come sapete diventare notturna, innanzi sera! Vi ricordate voi della scena in cui Persefone è sul punto di sprofondarsi nel Èrebo, mentre il coro delle Oceanidi geme ? Il suo volto somiglia al vostro quando s' oscura. [...] Il ricordo di voi mi aiutò ad evocare la persona divina, mentre componevo il mio Mistero. [...] Persefone. E una sera, nella vostra casa, [...] riusciste col vostro solo gesto a portare in luce nella mia anima la creatura che vi giaceva ancora inviluppata; e poi, inconsapevole di aver promossa quella subitanea natività, scompariste nell'intimo buio del vostro Èrebo. [...] Avrei dovuto consacrare la mia opera a voi, come a una Lucina ideale.[141]

Imagery of human birth is a tried and true metaphor for the process of artistic creation, but it is particularly apt in the case of an actress who will embody a playwright's work. The words of the text root in the fertile mind and body of the actor; the actor's body brings the characters into being.[142] D'Annunzio's sensitivity to the interdependence of this relationship is evident here — in this short passage, Effrena ticks off the elements of her performance abilities that allow his

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[139] Alongside Foscarina's increasing anxiety with regard to Effrena, in the second part, the text also emphasizes her previous theatrical roles. Indeed, she doesn't need the words of Effrena the *Rivelatore.* She has those of Shakespeare, Euripides, Racine, Sophocles, and Aeschylus.

[140] Again, a work that exists only within *Il fuoco*, though it appears in d'Annunzio's notes. (Carburlotto, *Il fuoco* notes, 9.)

[141] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 20-21.

[142] Both Wagner and d'Annunzio knew Aeschylus' *Eumenides* well — it's a frequent reference in both Wagner's *Art-work of the future* and throughout d'Annunzio's body of work. Apollo's famously misogynist speech on pregnancy and parenthood from the trial of the Eumenides runs like a thread through all of *Il fuoco*, but it is perhaps most prominent in Effrena's speech: "The mother is no parent of that which is called / her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed / that grows. The parent is he who mounts. A stranger she / preserves a stranger's seed, if no god interfere / […] the living witness, daughter of Olympian Zeus, / she who was never fostered in the dark of the womb / yet such a child as no goddess could bring to birth." (Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, 148.)

characters life—voice, face, gesture, the tools of the actor's trade. In d'Annunzio's blended mythology, Persephone is not only Demeter, whose passage she has just intoned, but also Orpheus, bringing rebirth into Erebus. But not even these contributions are enough for Foscarina to attain full recognition from the author, who underscores his ownership when he confesses, "avrei dovuto consacrare la mia opera a voi." "His" work and the conditional mode stress that even that dedication did not happen. Of similar import is that the next phrase, after this line, is "Ella soffriva, sotto lo sguardo dell'animatore." Even in the midst of gaining credit for the birth of this work, however, Foscarina cannot bear Effrena's gaze, while Effrena's epithet, "animatore", underscores his primacy in the creation of theater (she might embody his creations, but his words are the soul, the animating force).

Foscarina, this time as audience member, also anchors Effrena's performance with her gaze, as he gives his allegorical speech at the Palazzo Ducale.

> Mentre la voce gli saliva alle labbra condotta e affermata dalla volontà contro il turbamento istintivo, egli scorse la Foscarina diritta in piedi presso la ringhiera die circondava il globo celeste. Il volto pallidissimo della Tragica, sul collo privo di gioielli e su la purezza delle spalle nude, levavasi nell'orbe dei segni zodiacali. Stelio ammirò l'arte di quell'apparizione. Fissando i lontani occhi adoratori, egli cominciò a parlare con estrema lentezza, quasi che avesse ancor nell'orecchio il ritmo del remo.[143]

Beginning with the opening citation from *Inferno*, there is considerable textual allusion to Dante in the text, and the empowering gaze of Foscarina, emanating from the midst of the stars, which continually supports Effrena's artistic journey, bears noting in reference to Dante the Pilgrim's journey through the spaces of the afterlife. Foscarina's all-too-fleshly body diverges radically from the Beatrice of the spirit world, but d'Annunzio draws productively on Dante's illumination

[143] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 47-48.

of the power of gaze in *Commedia* — Virgil admonishes Dante in *Inferno* that he must purify his gaze in order to ascend into the higher realms; by *Paradiso,* gaze is the engine that motivates the pilgrim's motion through the realms of the the stars; Beatrice's final act of prayer for Dante is a smile, as she turns her gaze back to the eternal light:

> Così orai; e quella, sì lontana
> come parea, sorrise e riguardommi;
> poi si tornò a l'etterna fontana.
> E 'l santo sene: "Acciò che tu assommi
> perfettamente", disse, "il tuo cammino,
> a che priego e amor santo mandommi,
> vola con li occhi per questo giardino;
> ché veder lui t'acconcerà lo sguardo
> più al montar per lo raggio divino."[144]

In *Il fuoco*, too, Foscarina's gaze is both prayer and inspiration—it sustains the breath and words of Effrena, blotting out the rest of the world.

> E l'opera ch'egli nutriva entro di se, ancora informe, ebbe un fiero sussulto di vita; mentre i suoi occhi vedevano su l'orbe delle costellazioni eretta la Tragica la musa dalla voce divulgatrice, che pareva portare per lui nelle pieghe delle sue vesti raccolta e muta la frenesia delle moltitudini lontane.[145]

If a reader might be tempted to gloss over the references to Effrena nurturing a work inside him as if he possessed a womb, d'Annunzio presses relentlessly on the metaphor.

> Il suo sguardo tornava di continuo alla donna promessa, che mostravasi a lui come il fulcro vivente d'un mondo stellare. Egli le era grato di aver scelto un tal modo per apparirgli nell'atto di quella prima comunione. Egli ora non vedeva più in lei l'amante di una notte, il corpo maturato da lunghi ardori, carico di sapere voluttuoso ; ma vedeva lo strumento mirabile dell'arte novella, la divulgatrice della grande poesia, quella die doveva incarnare nella sua persona mutevole le

[144] Alighieri, *III*, 30.90-30.99.

[145] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 58. It is especially notable that d'Annunzio frames Foscarina as "Tragica" here (and elsewhere) because Effrena will soon assert that "il piacere è il più certo mezzo di conoscimento offertoci dalla Natura e che colui il quale molto ha sofferto è men sapiente di colui il quale molto ha gioito." (D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 68.)

> future finzioni di bellezza, quella che doveva portare ai popoli nella sua voce indimenticabile la parola risvegliatrice. Non per una promessa di piacere ma per una promessa di gloria egli ora si legava a lei. E l'opera ch'egli nutriva entro di se, ancora informe, ebbe un altro sussulto.[146]

D'Annunzio's symbolic language here is quite striking particularly in such close proximity to Foscarina, who has an actual womb. Foscarina is the instrument, the revelatory medium for Effrena's artistic glory, the town cryer of his words, and the host organism for his voice. Nonetheless, it is Effrena who is pregnant with a masterpiece, leaping inside his womb.

D'Annunzio returns to this metaphor again and again. In the Camerata scene after Effrena and Arvale's performances, Effrena's friends are effusive with praise for Foscarina's bearing and spectatorial performance, ratifying her artistic power:

> — Ma la vostra presenza silenziosa, nella Sala del Maggior Consiglio, dianzi, presso la sfera celeste — rispose il dottor mistico — non era meno eloquente della parola di Stelio, né meno musicale del canto di Arianna. Anche una volta voi avete scolpito divinamente nel silenzio la vostra propria statua, che vive nel nostro ricordo con la parola e col canto.
>
> Stello Èffrena, per un brivido occulto e profondissimo, rivide il mostro efìmero e versatile fuor del cui fianco emergeva la musa tragica dal capo alzato nell'orbe delle costellazioni.
>
> — E vero ! E vero ! — esclamò Francesco de Lizo. — Anch'io ho questo pensiero. Chi vi guardava, vi riconosceva come il centro vivente di quel mondo ideale che ognuno di noi — di noi fedeli, di noi prossimi — sentiva formarsi dalle sue stesse aspirazioni ascoltando la parola, il canto e la sinfonia.
>
> — Ognuno di noi — disse Fabio Molza — sentiva che nella vostra figura dominante su la folla, incontro al poeta, era un significato insolito e grandissimo.
>
> — Sembrava che voi sola foste per assistere alla nascita misteriosa di un'idea nuova — disse Antimo della Bella. — Tutto intorno sembrava animarsi per generare quell'idea, che presto sarà a noi rivelata, se ci valga l'averla attesa con tanta fede.
>
> L'animatore, con un altro brivido, senti sussultare entro di so l'opera ch'egli nutriva, ancora informe ma già vitale; e tutta la sua anima si inclinò con un moto impetuoso, come investita da un soffio lirico, verso la potenza di fecondazione e

[146] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 64.

> di rivelazione ch'emanava dalla donna dionisiaca a cui saliva la lode di quegli spiriti ferventi.[147]

Foscarina throbs with creative fecundity, and all of Effrena's friends are able to identify her role in Effrena's artistry, along with the symbols that reaffirm her status (above all, the "sfera celeste" that Glauro explicitly mentions). And nonetheless, once again, it is not Foscarina who enjoys the progeny of her artistic union, but Effrena who feels the leap within his womb. Instead, Foscarina is positioned as a public midwife to Effrena's pregnancy.

Foscarina's performance of spectatorship during Effrena's speech serves a narrative purpose as well, and that is to illustrate the creative value of silent receptivity. Her silent presence becomes, in itself, an act of creation. This will be of vital for d'Annunzio's methods of structuring meaning in the text. In the second half of the narrative, readers will be increasingly charged with populating silent moments with meaning. By giving an example of Foscarina, the consummate performer, in this capacity, d'Annunzio offers his protagonist inspiration and his readers a role model. Effrena's aesthetically inclined companions once again shoulder the work of interpretation, underscoring useful concepts for the readers who might have missed them.[148]

But Foscarina's fecundity in the text begins and ends as a metaphor for her artistry. The continuing use of pregnancy as a metaphor for Effrena's masterwork is particularly striking with reference to the presentation of the barren husk of Foscarina's body, rendered in excruciating detail through the course of their sexual encounters. D'Annunzio's portrayal of Foscarina explicitly highlights her preoccupations with her physical infertility. Amidst all the metaphors of

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[147] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 88-89.

[148] Effrena's mini-Camerata's praise of Foscarina also re-invigorates his sexual interest, as does his kaleidoscopic list of the many women who have inhabited the body of Foscarina onstage.

fertility and conception in *Il fuoco*, Foscarina's obsession with her presumed barrenness is a particularly stark component of the narrative, but it is also more than a bit odd. Eleonora Duse and Foscarina's resemblance is so striking that intrepid readers might perform the mental calculation of Duse's age—though she was 42 when *Il fuoco* was published in 1900, she turned 24 in the fall of 1882, in the era when Wagner arrived in Venice. Duse's daughter Enrichetta Checchi was also born in 1882.[149] Despite their many similarities, Duse and Foscarina's ages do not align, but it requires a bit of mental math to confirm this, and the information comes at only one point in the text, near the end, when Foscarina is reminiscing about her performance history (most of which also aligns with Duse's):

> Avevo appena quattordici anni quando recitai in una vecchia tragedia romantica intitolata Gaspara Stampa. Io facevo la parte della protagonista.... Fu al Dolo, dove passammo l'altro giorno per andare a Strà; fa in un piccolo teatro di campagna, in una specie di baracca.... Fu un anno prima che morisse mia madre,... Mi ricordo bene.... Mi ricordo di certe cose come se fossero di ieri. E sono passati venti anni!

This sets Foscarina's age in 1882 at 34 years old, closer to the age Duse was when d'Annunzio met her in 1894. While not the first flower of youth, the descriptions of Foscarina's preoccupations with aging and reproductive barrenness are rather excessive. With the descriptions given, one might expect her to be significantly older. Foscarina also does the work of conflating artistic creation and physical reproduction, but rather than presenting these potentials as creatively separate, Foscarina's apparent barrenness .

[149] Sica, *The Murray Edwards Duse Collection*, 48.

One of the elements that makes the depiction of sexuality in *Il fuoco* so jarring is that the text moves so swiftly from mystical reverence to destruction:

> Mai mai mai quell'uomo dimenticherà il passo che la Lussuria mosse verso di lui, il modo ch'ella ebbe nell'appressarsi, la rapida onda muta che gli si rovesciò sul petto, che l'avviluppò, che l'aspirò, che gli diede per alcuni attimi la paura e la gioia di patire una violenza divina, di dissolversi in una specie di calda umidità letale, come se tutto il corpo della donna avesse assunto a un tratto la qualità di una bocca suggente ed egli vi fosse preso intero. Chiuse gli occhi; obliò il mondo, la gloria. Una profondità tenebrosa e sacra si fece in lui come in un tempio. Il suo spirito era opaco e immobile; ma tutti i suoi sensi aspiravano a trascendere il limite umano, a gioire oltre l'impedimento, divenuti sublimi, atti a penetrare i misteri più remoti, a scoprire i segreti più reconditi, a trarre una voluttà da una voluttà come un'armonia da un'armonia, meravigliosi istrumenti, infinite virtù, realtà certe come la morte.[150]

This rapture transitions directly into the following:

> La donna gli pesava sopra con tutto il suo peso, lo teneva allacciato e coperto, premeva la fronte contro l'omero di lui, nascosta il volto, soffocatamente, con una stretta che non si allentava mai, indissolubile come quella del cadavere quando le sue braccia s'irrigidiscono intorno al vivente. Pareva ch'ella non volesse più abbandonare la sua presa, ch'ella non potesse più esserne distaccata se non con la recisione dei cubiti.[151]

Though he was rhapsodizing about his desire for Foscarina just a few paragraphs before, Effrena now feels constrained by Foscarina, then begins to fantasize about Donatella Arvale, and then, finally, he dozes off, dreaming of far-off glory. Jolted awake, he speaks to Foscarina: "– T'eri assopita anche tu? – chiese egli alla donna, sentendola abbandonata quasi fosse già estinta. E levò una mano, le sfiorò i capelli, la gota, il mento. Come se quella mano le schiantasse il cuore, ella ruppe in singhiozzi. Singhiozzò singhiozzò, là, sopra il petto di lui, senza morirvi."[152] There is, perhaps, a sense of moral outrage that might creep up when reading these lines. The one

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[150] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 152-153.

[151] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 152-153.

[152] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 154-155.

bright note in Foscarina's trajectory in *Il fuoco* is that she does have, after all, artistic and financial agency. She is able to construct an escape route.

At the tomb of the prophet

By harnessing history to his narrative purposes, d'Annunzio enables Effrena to bury Wagner not just symbolically, but literally.[153] Effrena has two encounters with the Richard's body. First, he and his friend Daniele Glauro encounter Wagner while traveling through the city. They are especially struck by his frail appearance, "Quel corpo, che era stato sostenuto nella lotta da un così fiero istinto di predominio, aveva ora l'apparenza di uno straccio che la raffica dovesse portar via e disperdere." [154] When Wagner is stricken and falls, they help to carry him to shore. Throughout *Il fuoco*, d'Annunzio capitalizes upon the musicality of the natural environment of Venice to create an ostinato for the narrative. But here he cleverly accompanies the scene with the natural rhythm of the heart of Wagner—an exterior representation of his music, the auditory representation of the rhythm of his life. Wagner's heartbeat is the both the man and the musician, reduced to a sound and a motion. It is the perfect metaphor for the passing of the artistic torch to Effrena.

> Essi portavano su le loro braccia il peso dell' Eroe, portavano il corpo tramortito di Colui che aveva diffusa la potenza della sua anima oceanica sul mondo, la carne moritura del Rivelatore clic aveva trasformato in infinito canto per la religione degli uomini le essenze dell'Universo. Con un brivido ineffabile di spavento e di gioia, come 1' uomo che veda un fiume precipitarsi da una rupe, un vulcano fendersi, un incendio

[153] "D'annunzio was twenty when Wagner died, and had not visited Venice before 1887, nor had he ever seen Wagner in person." Nonetheless, the autobiographical resonances between Effrena and d'Annunzio are so strong that some mid-twentieth century biographers report that d'Annunzio was Wagner's pallbearer. (Barker, *Wagner and Venice Fictionalized*, 35.)

[154] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 170.

> divorare una foresta, una meteora abbagliante nascondere il cielo stellato, come l'uomo al conspetto di una forza naturale che si manifesti improvvisa e irresistibile, Stello Effrena sentì sotto la sua mano che reggeva il busto passata per 1'ascella — egli s'arrestò un istante a riafferrare il vigore che gli fuggiva e guardò quel capo tutto bianco presso il suo petto — sentì sotto la sua mano ripalpitare il cuore sacro.[155]

The experience of Wagner's sickness fills Effrena with creative energy, and his work flourishes.

> La linea intera della melodia gli si era svelata, era omai sua, immortale nel suo spirito e nel mondo. Di tutte le cose viventi nessuna gli parve più vivente di quella. La sua vita medesima cedeva all'energia illimitata di quell' idea sonora, alla forza generatrice di quel germe capace d'indefiniti sviluppi. Egli la immaginò immersa nel mare sinfonico svolgersi per mille aspetti fino alla sua perfezione.
> — Daniele, Daniele, ho trovato!
> Egli alzò gli occhi, vide nel cielo adamantino le prime stelle, intuì alto silenzio in cui esse palpitavano. Imagini di cieli incurvati su paesi lontani traversarono il suo spirito; erano agitazioni di sabbie, di alberi, di acque, di polvere in giornate di vento: il Deserto libico, l'oliveto su la baia di Sàlona, il Nilo presso Memfi, l'Argolide sitibonda. Altre imagini sopraggiunsero. Egli temette di smarrire quel che aveva trovato. Con uno sforzo serrò la sua memoria come si serra il pugno che tiene. Scorse presso un pilastro 1' ombra d'un uomo, un luccicore in cima a un' asta lunga ; udì il piccolo scoppio della fiamma accesa in un fanale. Con una rapidità ansiosa, a quella luce, segnò le note del tema su una pagina del suo taccuino ; fissò nelle cinque linee la parola dell'elemento.[156]

The final scene of the text, however, does not reflect Effrena's glory, but Effrena and Glauro's service as pallbearers for the dead Wagner, escorting him out of Italy and back to Germany. More than an artist's awakening, this scene serves as an awakening of the Italian consciousness:

> All'approdo uno stuolo taciturno di devoti attendeva. Le larghe corone odoravano nell'aria cinerea. S'udiva l'acqua sbattere sotto le prue ricurve.
> I sei compagni tolsero il feretro dalla barca e lo portarono a spalla nel carro che era pronto su la via ferrata. I devoti appressandosi deposero le loro corone su la coltre. Nessuno parlava.
> Allora s'avanzarono i due artieri con i loro fasci di lauri colti sul Gianicolo. […]
> Nobilissimi erano quei lauri latini, recisi nella selva del colle dove in tempi remoti scendevano le aquile a portare i presagi, dove in tempi recenti e pur favolosi tanto fiume di sangue versarono per la bellezza d'Italia i legionarii del Liberatore. Avevano i rami

[155] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 174.

[156] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco,* 180-181.

> diritti robusti bruni, le foglie dure, fortemente innervate, con i margini aspri, verdi come il bronzo delle fontane, ricche d'un aroma trionfale.
>
> E viaggiarono verso la collina bàvara ancóra sopita nel gelo ; mentre i tronchi insigni mettevano già i nuovi germogli nella luce di Roma, al rumorio delle sorgenti nascoste.[157]

In conflating death, beauty, and nationalism in the service of artistic glory, d'Annunzio remains a follower of Wagner.

Music of the canals: silence and invention

> I shall say another word for the most select ears: what I really want from music. That it is cheerful and profound, like an afternoon in October. [...] When I seek another word for music, I never find any other word than Venice.
>
> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*[158]

Of all the references that d'Annunzio invokes, music is the most complex, and the variety of modes in which musical allusions appear in the text offer a glimpse into the range of possibilities for representing music in a text-based medium. None, however, are particularly precise in terms of conjuring actual sound for the reader. In "L'epifania di fuoco," with its performative focus, the majority of the musical references are to existing works—Marcello, Monteverdi, folk songs, Wagner. Many of these references are vocal works that are cited not by attempting to describe the song, but by incorporating lyrics as a shorthand for the poetic-musical unit. This is an efficient strategy for conjuring music, if the reader knows the reference. In this case, the words perform not only their own meaning, but as units of meaning enriched by sound.

In contrast to the performative focus of "L'epifania di fuoco," the primary narrative peaks

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[157] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 344.

[158] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 62.

of "L'impero di silenzio" are Effrena's encounters with the bodies of Foscarina and Wagner. But these physical encounters do not only represent dramatic moments in the narrative: these meetings actively bolster the composer's strength and creative fervor. In the silence of the second part of the text, d'Annunzio introduces the most vital of the musical references in the text: the embryonic music of Effrena's new total artwork.

In the second part of the text, rather than witnessing a performance unfold in real time, readers experience the artist's flashes of inspiration and creation:

> Formidabile era la voce del turbine in quella immobilità di secoli impietrati : sola dominatrice su la solitudine come quando i marmi dormivano nel grembo delle montagne e dalle isole fangose della laguna crescevano l'erbe selvagge intorno ai nidi degli uccelli, assai prima che in Rialto sedesse il doge, assai prima che i patriarchi guidassero i fuggiaschi verso il gran destino. La vita umana era scomparsa; non eravi sotto il cielo se non un immenso sepolcro ne' cui vani rimbombava quella voce, sola quella voce. Le moltitudini incenerite, i fasti dispersi, le grandezze cadute, gli innumerevoli giorni di nascita e di morte, le cose del tempo senza forma e senza nome commemorava ella col suo canto senza lira, con la sua lamentazione senza speranza. Tutta la malinconia del mondo passava nel vento su l'anima protesa.[159]

The trick, of course, is that there is no music represented here.

> Infaticabile il coro aereo saliva saliva, senza cedute, senza pause, empiendo di sé tutti gli spazìi, pari all'immenso deserto, pari all'infinita luce. L'impetuosa melodia nel sonno delle lagune creava l'illusione di un' ansia concorde che si levasse dalle acque, dalle sabbie, dalle erbe, dai vapori, da tutte le cose naturali per seguir la salita. Tutte le cose, che eran parse inerti, ora avevano un respiro profondo, un' anima commossa, un desiderio di favellare.
> — Ascolta! Ascolta!
> E le imagini della Vita evocate dall'animatore, e gli antichi nomi delle energie immortali circolanti nell'Universo, e le aspirazioni degli uomini a trascendere il cerchio del loro supplizio cotidiano per placarsi nello splendore dell'Idea, e i voti e le speranze e gli ardimenti e gli sforzi, in quel luogo di oblio e di preghiera, al conspetto dell'isola umile dove Io Sposo della Povertà aveva lasciato le sue vestigia, furono immuni dall'ombra della Morte per la sola virtù di quella melodia.

[159] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 180.

> — Non sembra l'allegrezza furente di un assalto? Invano le ripe squallide, le pietre sgretolate, le radici putrefatte, le tracce delle opere distrutte, gli odori del dissolvimento, i cipressi funebri, le croci nere, invano ricordavano la parola medesima che lungo il fiume le statue avevano espressa con le loro labbra di pietra. Più forte di tutti i segni, solo quel canto di libertà e di vittoria toccava il cuore di colui che doveva creare con gioia.
> — Avanti ! Avanti ! In alto, sempre più in alto ![160]

Nor here. D'Annunzio's descriptions of Marcello's *Arianna* were not especially precise in rendering the work's musical lines, but the descriptions of Effrena's evolving work are even more abstract. These representations exist in particularly stark contrast to the concrete presence of the text's artistic citations and its relentless focus on intimate corporeal detail (erotic and morbid in particular). What is ostensibly the centerpiece of d'Annunzio's masterpiece is vacant. Against the general noisiness of *Il fuoco*, these gaps are particularly striking. The musical elements of Effrena's composition are arguably its most vital feature, yet in the novel, they are silent. It is here, I argue, that the text does its most vital work, both as an interpreter of Wagner and as a generator of modernist prose.

Wagner himself adapts this precept into the total artwork in interesting ways. Wagner's importance as a theorist is partially situated in his convictions on the unity of music and words. Though invested in the unified power of the arts, and in the power of the human voice, Wagner's works also occasionally remind the reader of the primacy of music over language, manipulating conventions of music-text relations in moments of dramatic importance. Of particular interest is are instances when characters break into syllabic singing untethered to words, a practice most prominent in the mythical universe of *Der Ring des Niebelungen* (the Valkyrie's "hojotojo" being

[160] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 324-325.

the most famous). Allusions from the natural world (the *Rheingold* drone, *Siegfried*'s birdsong) gesture at reality without representing it in concrete detail.

It is in this practical space that d'Annunzio locates a solution to the key problematic of *Il fuoco*: representing a composition of towering power that does not exist. D'Annunzio's solution has three primary components: first, he gluts the stage of the text with so many sounds and images that the reader has a library of potential synesthetic material with which to build this silent content. By priming the reader with thousands of literary, artistic, musical, and atmospheric references, and more importantly, by actively conflating the media of these references, d'Annunzio offers a symphonic range of elements with which to paint the sound of these musical interludes. It is by definition a solution that privileges the individual reader—responses to reading this kind of gap must be as varied as the readers themselves. One might simply sub in the music of one of the earlier referents as a proxy: Marcello, Monteverdi, Beethoven, Wagner, Venetian folk songs. If traces of these works have remained with the reader, their sounds might echo in the mind, offering up their material to fill in this silence. Alternatively, the reader might hear a work completely outside the scope of the narrative, a musical idea suggested by some other component of the novel. She might see or feel or experience another sensation altogether.

Next, d'Annunzio's shift into parable as a dominant form of narrative development in *L'impero di silenzio* firmly establishes an exegetic practice for the reader: she must actively co-create meaning as she reads, preparing her for the creation of a grander sort that the musical gaps provoke. Additionally, D'Annunzio's relentless focus on the bodily responses to performance prime the reader to consider artistic reception in terms of physical sensation. If he describes the

sensations of music absent the music itself, can we simply bypass the music and move toward pure sensation?

Finally, as telegraphed by the title "L'impero di silenzio" d'Annunzio drops the sound out. He has studded the text with musical references and atmospheric sounds, but the most important sounds are the silence of Effrena's creation. Like Effrena's parable of glass pipes studded into the ocean of Venice to make a natural organ, music in *Il fuoco* springs from nature, embodied in the reader. The silence offers a space for contemplation, the ultimate unifying element for the musical drama is the content of the reader's mind.

The novel of the future

D'annunzio's panoply of artistic references in the text call attention to the unique features and potential of the novel format. Perhaps no framework articulates this approach better than Mikhail Bakhtin's assertion in "Discourse in the novel" that:

> The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized. These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and language, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization—-this is a the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.[161]

D'Annunzio's ability to both exploit and comment upon the nuanced functions of multiple genres is particularly unique because of his extensive work in diverse genres—by 1900, he was

[161] Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 263.

well-published as a poet, journalist, and playwright. In comparison with these other forms, the novel is also distinct because of its material form. Poems, though they can be published in book form, can also be split and reinterpreted or recited out loud. Works of theater, even those with d'Annunzio's famously extensive stage directions, reach their fullest extension when performed. Novels, however, are bound by their material form. Current trends that relate reading of the novel to self-contained performances seem particularly relevant to d'Annunzio's practice in *Il fuoco*, as it is a text that hinges on performance, but also hums with an awareness of its own material identity as a novel.

If reading can be framed as a performance practice, this, in turn, places the role of Effrena's silent music in the spotlight. If each reading is a performance, a deed, what happens when the reader performs what isn't there? In this, we can look back to the opening for a clue on interpretation.

Dante's *Commedia,* referenced before the text begins and throughout the narrative, offers a useful literary lens through which to view d'Annunzio's project in *Il fuoco*. In the *Commedia*, Dante is preoccupied with staging sensory experience; he continually manipulates narrative style to engage diverse forms of readerly attention. As Dante's pilgrim rises through the realms of the afterlife, the style of description changes, and so do the thematic fixations of the author. While all three canti incorporate physical descriptions, historical references, artistic allusions, and musical citations, as we move through the three parts, the focus on the body wanes and the focus on music grows. The *Inferno* includes no songs at all, but it does feature a great deal of (unpleasant) sound imagery. *Purgatory* features chant in unison, and as Dante the pilgrim rises to the earthly paradise, song takes a greater role. *Paradiso* features a host of references to polyphonic choral

works. The escalation of musical references stimulates a heightened awareness of sound as the pilgrim travels through the realms of the blessed.

Another factor that escalates in *Paradiso* is the narrator's use of silence as a descriptor. Teodolinda Barolini writes on the power of the *Commedia*'s narration to use a lapse in content to puncture the web of the text, priming the reader to maintain the text experience even when it has ended.[162] In *Paradiso*, silence becomes a space for communion with the narrator, for contemplation, and possibly, for a sense of projection into the textual vision. Of course, if these are the intended aims for the tactic, this tactic offers no guarantees for their success: *Inferno*, by far the most concrete of the three parts, is often considered the most exciting, while *Paradiso,* which features the most "gaps" in narration, has a reputation for being difficult and boring. If this silence and space opens immense potential for reader experience, that window naturally includes the potential for greater failure. But opening up these spaces of possibility not only inspires readers, but it inspires future writers, and that is perhaps where d'Annunzio excels most strongly in his task.

When *Il fuoco* was published in 1900, it was projected as a trilogy, and d'Annunzio published it with the names of the two volumes that were to follow: *La Vittoria dell'Uomo* and *Trionfo della Vita*.[163] These volumes were never written. *Il fuoco* had an uneven reception history —-it sold well, garnering a few staunch supporters and a large number of critics. It joined the Vatican index of banned books almost immediately after it was published. However, writers such

[162] Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*, 220.

[163] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco* (1900), prefatory page.

as James Joyce called it "the most important achievement in the novel since Flaubert" [164] Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of d'Annunzio relationship to *Il fuoco* is the fact that, while his tactics in style are pioneering within the novel proper, and seem to gesture toward new novelistic frontiers, they weren't of interest to d'Annunzio.

D'Annunzio didn't stop writing after *Il fuoco,* but his attention did shift markedly toward theater and away from novels. The encomion to theater that Effrena suggests seems to have convinced d'Annunzio, as well. In this sense, *Il fuoco* is even more apt as a narrative response to Wagner, as it functions much like Wagner's own manifesti. As a narrative manifesto, perhaps *Il fuoco* is more successful in inspiring artistic innovation than in achieving it.

Il fuoco is the last novel d'Annunzio published before his most fertile period of dramatic production. D'Annunzio was not a composer, but after *Il fuoco*'s publication, he did go on to contribute to two *dramme per musica*, both of which saw the author crafting dramatic text settings in conjunction with composers and production teams. The first, *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastian,* was a collaboration with Claude Debussy in 1911, modeled on the structure elaborated by Effrena in *Il fuoco*: dramatic selections interspersed with musical and dance interludes. It was a start-studded production: Ida Rubenstein danced, Michel Fokine provided choreography, Léon Bakst designed the sets, and Proust attended its opening in Paris.[165] Despite the hype and celebrity power surrounding both works, neither enjoyed popular success. Here, d'Annunzio might have taken Wagner and Effrena's examples to heart. The difficulty in crafting multimedia artworks lies largely in the coordination of skills and egos of the participants. Andrea

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[164] Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 59.

[165] Mirabile, *Multimedia anthologies: Gabriele D'Annunzio, Belle Époque Paris, and the Total Artwork*, 25.

Mirabile, in his exploration of d'Annunzio's time in Paris, argues passionately for d'Annunzio's place in the canon: "other authors and other works enjoy greater critical attention, or are considered part of the canon of modernism, yet the Italian poet and his oeuvre are important for at least two reasons: they summarize themes that pertain to both the Decadent and the Modernist age: and they belong to more than one national tradition, semiotic dimension, and genre."[166] It is perhaps precisely this dynamic that I define as "Wagnerian."

I read *Il fuoco* as a template for distilling the multimedia experience of musical drama into a pure textual format, even if, for d'Annunzio, it seems to have served as a theatrical manifesto in novel form, a prelude to his shift to theatrical writing. Though d'Annunzio's Effrena seeks to overturn the dominance of Wagner, in this important respect, d'Annunzio the writer steps fully in line with Wagner's theatrical prescriptions. d'Annunzio's Effrena is unlike d'Annunzio in the fact that he is a composer himself--he doesn't need a collaborator in order to produce the work's full form. *Il fuoco* harnesses the novel's all-encompassing power to create a hero that can do it all. Because the work is never performed within the text itself, it remains always in its idealized form. Transference happens between the reader and the author with only the mediation of publication specifications, reading environment, and the reader's personal engagement with the narrative's embedded artistic references.

Il fuoco offers a result that is something unexpected: in a text explicitly concerned with the artistic flowering of a genius and in offering a glut of sensory detail, the final musical innovation is in the hands of the readers, who must populate the silence Effrena has constructed. The result is improvisational. In the end, it is not Effrena, but the reader who is the creator, the

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[166] Mirabile, *Multimedia anthologies*, 25.

theater, the actor. Behind its meditations on multimedia performance, *Il fuoco* might be read, instead, as a meditation on the powers of the printed novel.

D'Annunzio signs the novel on February 13, 1900, giving his location as "Settignano di Desiderio," where he was living in the hills above Florence. In this little twist of nameplay, d'Annunzio says so much. He brands the town with the name of one of its most famous former inhabitants, the Renaissance sculptor Desiderio di Settignano, inscribing the person into the place. He also frames it as a site of desire. D'Annunzio would have to wait some decades before he acquired his own Bayreuth, the Vittoriale degli Italiani on Lake Garda. But in *Il fuoco*, he is already setting all his pieces in place.

Chapter Three
Marcel Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu:* Book as Bayreuth

> [J]e n'avais encore fait que quelques pas dans les salons avec la duchesse de Guermantes quand une petite dame brune, extrêmement jolie, l'arrêta :
>
> « Je voudrais bien vous voir. D'Annunzio vous a aperçue d'une loge, il a écrit à la princesse de T*** une lettre où il dit qu'il n'a jamais rien vu de si beau. Il donnerait toute sa vie pour dix minutes d'entretien avec vous. En tout cas, même si vous ne pouvez pas ou ne voulez pas, la lettre est en ma possession. Il faudrait que vous me fixiez un rendez-vous. Il y a certaines choses secrètes que je ne puis dire ici. »
>
> -Marcel Proust,
> *Sodome et Gomorrhe*[167]

Richard Wagner does not appear in the flesh in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. For a brief conversational moment in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, however, Gabriele d'Annunzio does. D'Annunzio's appearance in the novel, mediated by both his letter to the princess and the intervention of the would-be procuratrix, is notable for several reasons germane to this study. First, it draws into focus sites of spectacle: it eroticizes the theater itself ("D'Annunzio vous a aperçue d'une loge") and the reception where, standing by her husband the Duc, the Duchesse might receive such a melodramatic missive. In a novel in which interpolated works of art orient all of the action, this particular reference highlights not d'Annunzio's works for the page or the theater, but his infamous biography: his comportment with women. Finally, it places into conversation written and oral modes of communication: the written letter, sent, passed along, and guarded for future transmission; the intervention of the young woman's performative encounter.

[167] Proust, *III,* 66.

A final reference to "certaines choses secrètes" seems an apt premonition of d'Annunzio's published diary, *Il Libro segreto di Gabriele d'Annunzio*, which wasn't released until 1935, after Proust's death. Nonetheless, as a book of memory that performs the private as spectacle, a public-facing "*libro segreto"* seems an ideal analogy for d'Annunzio's biographical and narrative practices, so Proust's usage here is particularly prescient.[168]

Back in the narrative world, the Duc, hearing this interchange, muses suspiciously on friendships with writers:

> Le duc de Guermantes n'était pas enchanté de ces offres. Incertain si Ibsen ou d'Annunzio étaient morts ou vivants, il voyait déjà des écrivains, des dramaturges allant faire visite à sa femme et la mettant dans leurs ouvrages. Les gens du monde se représentent volontiers les livres comme une espèce de cube dont une face est enlevée, si bien que l'auteur se dépêche de « faire entrer » dedans les personnes qu'il rencontre. C'est déloyal évidemment, et ce ne sont que des gens de peu. Certes, ce ne serait pas ennuyeux de les voir « en passant », car grâce à eux, si on lit un livre ou un article, on connaît « le dessous des cartes », on peut « lever les masques ». Malgré tout, le plus sage est de s'en tenir aux auteurs morts. M. de Guermantes trouvait seulement « parfaitement convenable » le monsieur qui faisait la nécrologie dans le Gaulois.[169]

In the case of d'Annunzio, the Duc's suspicions are thoroughly justified. Much of the scandal related to the reception of *Il fuoco* had to do with Eleonora Duse's transparent presence within the cube of the text (perhaps the readers resented the thrill they took in removing Foscarina's mask).[170] But even if the bodies are alive when the writing is taking place, the Duc's observation eventually becomes true of all writers: whether writing from life is originally destined for a novel

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[168] D'Annunzio appears by name one other time in the *Recherche*: in a complaint in *La Prisonnière* about journalists who pontificate about the changes in society after the war, supposing "qu'on n'admirera plus Ibsen, Renan, Dostoïevski, Annunzio, Tolstoï, Wagner, Strauss. Car les journalistes philosophes tirent argument des dessous équivoques de ces manifestations officielles pour trouver quelque chose de décadent à l'art qu'elles glorifient, et qui bien souvent est le plus austère de tous." (Proust, *III*, 769.)

[169] Proust, *III,* 66.

[170] Hughes-Hallet, *Gabriele d'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer, and Preacher of War*, 197.

or the *nécrologie*, it is simply a matter of time before all of the bodies represented end up dead. The thrust of the Duc's concern, then, is the spectacle of transcribing art (and life) in public while those who can recognize the resemblance might read it. The narrator assures the reader in *Le temps retrouvé* that:

> Dans ce livre, où il n'y a pas un seul fait qui ne soit fictif, où il n'y a pas un seul personnage « à clefs », où tout a été inventé par moi selon les besoins de ma démonstration, je dois dire, à la louange de mon pays, que seuls les parents millionnaires de Françoise ayant quitté leur retraite pour aider leur nièce sans appui, que seuls ceux-là sont des gens réels, qui existent. Et persuadé que leur modestie ne s'en offensera pas, pour la raison qu'ils ne liront jamais ce livre, c'est avec un enfantin plaisir et une profonde émotion que, ne pouvant citer les noms de tant d'autres qui durent agir de même et par qui la France a survécu, je transcris ici leur nom véritable : ils s'appellent, d'un nom si français, d'ailleurs, Larivière.[171]

Of course, this statement bears no resemblance to reality. An entire industry has cropped up around scouring the people, places, and artworks of the *Recherche* for any possible resemblance that can be found in real life, and these real lives are therafter marked by the details of their Proustian counterparts. In profiles of Count Robert de Montesquieu, the fact that he served as a inspiration for Proust's Baron de Charlus reliably receives top billing. Barthes frames this relationship in "Death of the Author" as such, "By a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel, as is so often maintained, he made of his very life a word for which his own book was the model; so that it is clear to us that Charlus does not imitate Montesquiou but that Montesquiou—in his anecdotal, historical reality—is no more than a secondary fragment, derived from Charlus".[172]

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[171] Proust, *III*, 424.

[172] Barthes, "Death of the Author," *Image, Music, Text,* 144.

A recent retrospective of the clothing of the comtesse de Greffulhe, a prime inspiration for the Duchesse de Guermantes, at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology publicized the work primarily as a chance to see the works reflected in the *Recherche*.[173]

Robe de garden party, House of Worth, Paris, 1894. Worn by the comtesse Greffulhe at Versailles May 30, 1894 for

Proust's particular brand of hypertextuality has generated a mountain of theoretical frameworks. I have used one particular orientation to structure my argumentation in the first chapter, and I find it helpful to return here to the idea of "biotext" as actively linking personal

[173] Saillard, *La Mode Retrouvée: Les robes trésors de la comtesse Greffulhe*, 84-85, 148.

experience and hypertext.[174] At the Morgan Library and Museum, a pillar stands alone in a basement room. Atop it, spread open, is Cesar Franck's *Sonata for violin and piano in A Major*. The card below reads, "Proust in his *Remembrance of Things Past* used the work as one of the models for Vinteuil's sonata.[175] Closing the gaps between Proust's depictions in the *Recherche* and their real life counterparts is a long-standing Proustian pastime.

D'Annunzio and Proust

It is uncertain whether d'Annunzio and Proust met each other in life, though a meeting is possible. D'Annunzio lived in Paris from 1910-1915 and was close to Robert de Montesquiou, who actively courted d'Annunzio's friendship and sought to introduce him to the bright lights of the Parisian writing scene. Montesquieu hosted a dinner party in d'Annunzio's honor in June of 1910 in order to to cultivate the author's friendship with Maurice Barrès in particular:

> The pomegranate—d'Annunzio's emblem and the symbol of intellectual pleasure—adorned the cover of an album entitled *Dîner de Grenade* which each guest found in his plate. To solemnize this event, Robert de Montesquiou, always ready to pour out his money, his perfumes, and even his perfidies, rose at the end of the dinner to recite oratorically the following poem which he had composed for the occasion:
>
> La grenade, ce fruit que vous avez fait vôtre
> Et qui loge des grains de rubis dans son coeur
> Mais d'un rubis vivant, plus suave que l'autre
> Un rubis que l'on mange, ayant un goût de fleur [...]
>
> Afterward, Julia Bartet declaimed the passage at the beginning of *Il fuoco* where Stelio Effrena, the hero of the novel, tells Foscarina why he made the pomegranate his own

[174] Gidding, "HyperProust," *Proust in Perspective*, 275.

[175] Franck, *Sonata for violin and piano in A Major,* autograph manuscript, The Morgan Library, New York.

emblem.[176]

This fruitful exchange makes the search for traces of d'Annunzio in Proust even more tempting. Proust did attend the premiere of *Le martyre de Saint Sébastian,* d'Annunzio's total work of art collaboration with Debussy and Ida Rubenstein. With set designs by Léon Bakst, the production harnessed the "trinità dionisiaca" d'Annunzio's Effrena championed in *Il fuoco*. In a letter to Reynaldo Hahn, Proust remarked of the production, "J'ai trouvé la pièce bien ennuyeuse malgré des moments, et la musique agréable mais bien mince, bien insuffisante, bien écrasée par le sujet, la réclame et l'orchestre bien immense pour ces quelques pets."[177] In most accounts of the evening, D'Annunzio, according to his standard practice, skipped the first performances of the drama, so he was not in attendance the night that Proust was there.[178] [179] While it is uncertain whether the two figures encountered each other face to face, Roberto Gramolini asserts that it is "évident que Proust a la plus haute estime de d'Annunzio. [...] Nous sommes cependant persuadés que Proust a lu une grande partie de l'oeuvre de d'Annunzio, dont les traces se retrouvent en filigrande dans *À la recherche du temps perdu*.[180] *Il fuoco* is never referenced explicitly in the *Recherche*, but Gramolini identifies four passages from *Il fuoco* that have

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[176] Gullace, *Gabriele d'Annunzio in France: A study in cultural relations*, 201. The scene in *Il fuoco* is as follows: "Guardate le vostre melagrane!' Per voi, e per quelli che mi amano, esse non potranno mai essere se non mie. Per voi, e per loro, l'idea della mia persona è legata indissolubilmente al frutto che io ho eletto per emblema e che ho sovraccaricato di significazioni ideali più numerose de' suoi granelli." (D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 22.)

[177] Mirabile, *Multimedia Archaeologies*, 24.

[178] Mirabile, *Multimedia Archaeologies*, 25.

[179] Conversely, see: Tosi, *La vie et le rôle de D'Annunzio en France au début de la grande guerre (1914-1915): exposé chronologique d'après des documents inédits,* 6. Tosi asserts that the two authors were introduced at the premiere of *Le martyre de Saint Sébastian.*

[180] Gramolini, "Proust lecteur de d'Annunzio," 398.

particular resonance with scenes in the *Recherche*.[181] Samuel Beckett, in his *Proust*, makes an awkward comparison between the two novels, juxtaposing the "contemplative stasis" and "pure act of understanding" of the *Recherche* with the stagnation of the "horrible pomegranates of *Il fuoco*, bursting and bleeding, dripping the red ooze of their seed, putrid on the putrid water."[182] And yet, *Il fuoco* shares a number of productive corollaries with d'Annunzio's "illisible" novel.

Wagner and Proust

Richard Wagner's influence on the *Recherche*, however, is explicit. Wagner is referred to more than any other musician in the text, including the narrative world's own composer, Vinteuil. The only other real-world artists that figure equally prominently are all writers: Balzac, Hugo, Racine, Saint-Simon, Sévigné. Consequently, there have been a number of excellent studies that treat facets of the relationship between Proust and Wagner. In *Proust as Musician,* Jean-Jacques Nattiez spends a chapter framing "*Parsifal* as redemptive model for the redemptive work."[183] In this study, Nattiez charts the resonance of leitmotivic technique in Proust's strategies in the *Recherche*, a topic to which I will return. He also explores the presence of *Parsifal* in early drafts of the novel (particularly *Matinée Chez la Princesse de Guermantes*, the rough draft for *Le temps retrouvé*) and its necessary erasure in favor of the Vinteuil septet, which would allow the narrator to "experience his revelation through an *imaginary* work of art, for according to the logic of the novel, a real work always disappoints: attainment of the absolute could only be suggested by a

[181] Gramolini, "Proust lecteur de d'Annunzio," 408-409.

[182] Beckett, *Proust,* 71.

[183] Nattiez, *Proust as musician*, 13.

work that was unrealized, unreal, and ideal. [...] The redemptive work cannot be of this world." [184] Finally, Nattiez posits the *Recherche* as a work that conveys "a message of salvation," that "preached the eminent dignity of art, which had the capacity to snatch away those who understood it from the difficulties and disappointments of life." [185]

Emile Bedriomo's *Proust, Wagner, et la coïncidence des arts* delves deeper into the dynamics that link the two artists: the cyclical structure, the use of recurrent motifs, the hyperesthetic orientation of the writer and composer. Bedriomo's observations form a useful sourcebook of musical and literary tactics in the *Recherche*, but because Proust capitalizes upon the prose format to expand upon these elements himself, the revelations in this volume are at times are no more striking than Proust's own elaborations.

In "Proust and Wagner: The climb to the octave above, or, the scale of love (and death)" in *Around Proust,* Goodkin frames the emotional expression of the novel as a journey up the musical scale: "the novel, like the climb up the musical scale and the arrival at its upper octave, is both a resistance of emotion and an expression of it." In his elaboration, Goodkin stresses in particular the function of repetition in staging this practice and the transformative components of love and death in "reveal(ing) at last what one is feeling." [186] Finally, in one of the foundational studies of Proust and music, Georges Piroué's *Proust et la musique du devenir* explores in

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[184] Nattiez, *Proust as musician*, 26-30.

[185] Nattiez, *Proust as musician*, 32-33. Nattiez is also the author of a rich and insightful study, *Wagner androgyne.* As an interesting side note on Wagnerian obsession, I have been amused to find that many of the critics I find particularly insightful for the novels I treat in this study have also written important works on Wagner. This is true for Mary Cicora, Patrick Carnegy, and Raymond Furness (who also wrote a novel, *On Heligoland,* in which Wagner plays a prominent role). Perhaps all roads do lead to Bayreuth.

[186] Goodkin, *Around Proust*, 125.

particular the musical structure of the *Recherche*.[187] All of these works contribute to the understanding of Proust's deployment of music and language in the *Recherche*.

The dimensions of Wagner I seek to explore in this chapter are, as in the case of my analysis of *Il fuoco*, quite a bit broader than those set forth in the aforementioned critical works. Indeed, one factor conspicuously absent from examinations of Proust and Wagner to date is the presence of d'Annunzio as a mediating figure between the two artists. Proust adapts not just Wagner via his musical dramas or his many publications, but Wagner as refracted via *Il fuoco*. Consequently, this chapter will first chart the primary fields that tie *Il fuoco* and the *Recherche*. I will then explore Proust's presentation of autoportrait within the *Recherche*. From there, I will turn my attention to the categories that dominate Proust's multimedia adaptation strategy in full: Visual art, Fashion, Venice, the actress Berma, and Music—specifically Vinteuil (fictional) and Wagner (historical). Finally, I will explore the dimensions of the printed book as they relate to the exploration and presentation of the self.

Après d'Annunzio: The total work of prose

If d'Annunzio's *Il fuoco* establishes a foundation for the construction of the prose *Gesamtkunstwerk,* Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu* picks up its narrative tools to continue the project. Rather than dispatching d'Annunzio's staging devices toward the conceptualization of an external theatrical glory, however, Proust turns them inward. Both dependent upon and resistant to the practices established by d'Annunzio, the *Recherche* is a second generation "total work of prose" that is particularly revolutionary in its challenge to

[187] I have already noted my reservations surrounding the equivocation of literary and musical structure.

Wagner's artistic hierarchy. Proust stages the *Recherche* as a multimedia theater of words — a synthetic vision of art and life unfiltered by performance or fractured by collaboration. The novel capitalizes on the power of multisensory experience as championed by Wagner and d'Annunzio's drama. However, Proust both allows for the power of this experience within the novel proper and, instead of presenting art as a rarefied space in which to transcend the quotidian, Proust vigorously stages the quotidian itself as art.

À la recherche du temps perdu shares a great many structural similarities with *Il fuoco,* the most basic being its narrative trajectory: the central focus of the *Recherche* is the development of its narrator/protagonist into an artist, and musical composition and contemplation play a key role in the novel's narrative trajectory. However, Proust's narrator/ protagonist is different in one essential way from d'Annunzio's: he is an aspiring writer, not a poet/composer. Proust still depends heavily on the union of art, music, theater, and text in his exposition, but it is Proust's narrative elaboration that unifies these diverse forms, not a single poly-artist character. Consequently, Proust outsources the task of musical composition to another character, and his narrator's stakes in the novel's music are those of a listener rather than creator. Despite the transposition of music's position in the narrative (Wagner need no longer watch his throne, or his heart), the elements that link the *Recherche* to Wagner are legion. Wagner's works and writings feature heavily as points of contact and inspiration, and even in pure meditations on Wagner's power, the narrator takes the composer's prescriptions regarding the union of the arts seriously, fusing the visual with the musical. Wagner is most easily adapted into the novel via synesthetic description:

> Je me rendais compte de tout ce qu'a de réel l'œuvre de Wagner, en revoyant ces thèmes insistants et fugaces qui visitent un acte, ne s'éloignent que pour revenir, et, parfois lointains, assoupis, presque détachés, sont, à d'autres moments, tout en restant vagues, si pressants et si proches, si internes, si organiques, si viscéraux qu'on dirait la reprise moins d'un motif que d'une névralgie.
>
> La musique, bien différente en cela de la société d'Albertine, m'aidait à descendre en moi-même, à y découvrir du nouveau : la variété que j'avais en vain cherchée dans la vie, dans le voyage, dont pourtant la nostalgie m'était donnée par ce flot sonore qui faisait mourir à côté de moi ses vagues ensoleillées. Diversité double. Comme le spectre extériorise pour nous la composition de la lumière, l'harmonie d'un Wagner, la couleur d'un Elstir nous permettent de connaître cette essence qualitative des sensations d'un autre où l'amour pour un autre être ne nous fait pas pénétrer. Puis diversité au sein de l'œuvre même, par le seul moyen qu'il y a d'être effectivement divers : réunir diverses individualités.[188]

In a clever fusion, Proust first refers to Wagnerian motif (the reader might flip through her mental rolodex to settle on whichever is her favorite) and then, by using light, color, and neuralgia to describe music, Proust allows the reader to co-create the sound reference along with the narrator. Because there is no precise description of which particular motif, only synesthetic suggestion, the music most familiar to the reader (or another type of sensation altogether) can play out in her mind as she contemplates this passage. By omitting specific musical references, Proust places Wagner's works as a body of compositions that, particularly framed in this way, facilitate the pure contemplation of theme in one's own life.

Stage and stove

D'Annunzio's Effrena, like Wagner, sets grand ambitions for his theatrical works; so grand that he conscripts architecture into them, that he might construct a theater worthy of framing his dramatic happenings. But behind its firework-studded revelations and use of global

[188] Proust, *III*, 665.

cultural monuments as set dressing, *Il fuoco*'s panorama also assimilates the natural environment and the quieter events of daily life. Beyond the rapid ascendance of his chosen star, d'Annunzio's narration also casts its spotlight upon the artisanship of Venetian crafstpeople throughout the centuries, the pivotal societal position of the gondolier, the restorative quality of simple food, the evocative power of a folk song. In *Il fuoco*, the everyday serves as set dressing for an exalted protagonist, an ascendant poet king.

For Proust, in contrast, the quotidian itself is a star. Every subject is fit for the artist's eye, not only the sublime or the grotesque, but the ordinary. This does not imply that Proust rejects high culture in favor of the everyday. Like d'Annunzio, Proust will employ iconic cultural masterpieces in service of his narrative aims (including, like d'Annunzio, Venice's museums and churches). However, for Proust, these exalted works are not the only objects worthy of narrative contemplation. Virtually any action carries the potential for artistic excellence, even a trip to the market by the narrator's housekeeper, Françoise:

> Françoise, heureuse de s'adonner à cet art de la cuisine pour lequel elle avait certainement un don, stimulée, d'ailleurs, par l'annonce d'un convive nouveau, et sachant qu'elle aurait à composer, selon des méthodes sues d'elle seule, du bœuf à la gelée, vivait dans l'effervescence de la création; comme elle attachait une importance extrême à la qualité intrinsèque des matériaux qui devaient entrer dans la fabrication de son œuvre, elle allait elle-même aux Halles se faire donner les plus beaux carrés de romsteck, de jarret de bœuf, de pied de veau, comme Michel-Ange passant huit mois dans les montagnes de Carrare à choisir les blocs de marbre les plus parfaits pour le monument de Jules II.[189]

This turn is especially characteristic of Proust's approach in the *Recherche,* using artistic masterworks not to supersede the quotidian but to engage fluidly with it. The narrator's references to Françoise's artistic prowess are simultaneously humorous and sincere. Over the

[189] Proust, *I*, 437.

course of time and narrative space, the reader witnesses as the narrator evolves from a child spurred by social ambition to to an adult with a more nuanced understanding of the world. This dynamic is particularly evident in the evolution of his relationship with Françoise. While the narrator comments on her speech throughout all the volumes, the tone of his conception of her changes from his priggish early years:

> Si alors Françoise, remplie comme un poète d'un flot de pensées confuses sur le chagrin, sur les souvenirs de famille, s'excusait de ne pas savoir répondre à mes théories et disait : « Je ne sais pas m'exprimer », je triomphais de cet aveu avec un bon sens ironique et brutal digne du docteur Percepied ; et si elle ajoutait : « Elle était tout de même de la parentèse, il reste toujours le respect qu'on doit à la parentèse », je haussais les épaules et je me disais : « Je suis bien bon de discuter avec une illettrée qui fait des cuirs pareils », adoptant ainsi pour juger Françoise le point de vue mesquin d'hommes dont ceux qui les méprisent le plus dans l'impartialité de la méditation sont fort capables de tenir le rôle, quand ils jouent une des scènes vulgaires de la vie.[190]

His tone is much warmer in his later years, in which he realizes not only that she has a role on the stage as well, but that, despite her position, she is uniquely able to understand his experiences, no matter their literary character.

> Quand je n'aurais pas auprès de moi tous mes papiers, toutes mes paperoles, comme disait Françoise, et que me manquerait juste celui dont j'aurais eu besoin, Françoise comprendrait bien mon énervement, elle qui disait toujours qu'elle ne pouvait pas coudre si elle n'avait pas le numéro du fil et les boutons qu'il fallait, et puis, parce que, à force de vivre ma vie, elle s'était fait du travail littéraire une sorte de compréhension instinctive, plus juste que celle de bien des gens intelligents, à plus forte raison que celle des gens bêtes.[191]

Proust's narrator's generalized snobbery doesn't blind him to the potential for humble triumphs, either in his narration or his characters. This is an extreme departure from the world of Effrena, who frames himself as all three godheads in one, the progenitor of his own female "trinità

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[190] Proust, *I*, 152.

[191] Proust, *IV*, 611.

dionisiaca." While d'Annunzio builds Effrena into a man set apart, thrilled by his own artistic potential, Proust's narrator struggles with doubt and anxiety that match his talent. His literary endeavors are stagnant for much of the text—the reader sees the work behind his artistic efforts rather than just the glory. This is a particularly vital shift in terms of the novel's potential reception. While Wagner's creation of art happens, necessarily, offstage, his publication of autobiography and theory contribute to demystifying the process of creation. The genesis of Effrena's creation takes place on the page, but it is both highly abstract (the music composition parts in particular) and tagged as the domain of a singular genius. Proust's narrator, in contrast, works through the labor of the creation of the text on the page. He does not experience just the glamorous components of inspiration, but the doubts and turmoil and physical challenges attending the process of writing. This helps gives the (perhaps illusory) impression that the reader could do so as well.

The protracted narrative and temporal space of the *Recherche* also enables the reader to witness the shifting fortunes of the families and characters Proust treats, including the narrator himself. The overwhelming takeaway from the *Recherche* is that there is the possibility of social and artistic mobility, but that this mobility works in both directions, often in unexpected ways: great families fall, modest individuals rise. These changes are unpredictable, and at times they occur after death, but at the very least, rather than a focus on innate genius, there is the suggestion that individual action holds some importance, and that action is the only solution to impermanence.

Due in part to this emphasis on social mobility, a cluster of trade nonfiction works offer up Marcel Proust as self-help guru, underscoring the ways in which the narrative of the

Recherche can "change (their) life". Needless to say, 'Annunzio's Effrena does not offer the average reader the potential for mimicry (nor does he offer it to d'Annunzio himself—Effrena's own ability in musical composition was not among d'Annunzio's many talents). Nonetheless, the tools and symbols of Wagner and d'Annunzio allow Proust to build his revolutionary world.

Noms de personnages: Le nom

In establishing his method of autobiographical conflation in the novel, Proust begins to shift away from d'Annunzio's practices. Though *Il fuoco* complicates the presentation of author and protagonist, the thrust of its narrative trajectory is relentlessly external. D'Annunzio sets Effrena's course toward a new form of theatrical spectacle, toward a newly built theater, toward a new poet-king formation of political unity for Italy, toward, at the very least, the next volume in the *Romanze del melograno* series. The *Recherche* is famously circular in its narrative elaboration.

Proust's staging of the narrative voice also immediately defines the novel's confessional style. "Je" is novel's second word, and the intimate and revealing tone of Proust's narrator/ protagonist enables Proust to develop the narrative in directions unaccessible to *Il fuoco*'s omniscient narration (despite its occasional forays into free indirect discourse). D'Annunzio presses the question of authorial and autobiographical identity in *Il fuoco* primarily by attributing the creation of a selection of his own works and biographical details to fictional characters within his text. Proust deploys this tactic as well—over the course of the text there are allusions to the narrator's work on the English critic and author John Ruskin, including a translation of *Sesame and lilies*. Proust himself published an obituary of Ruskin, followed by translations of *Bible of*

*Amien*s and *Sesame and lilies*, both with extensive introductory content.[192] But this is not the only forum in which fiction and reality are conflated. The *Recherche* offers up a world that continuously blends fiction and reality. By using "je" and withholding his narrator's name for the majority of the text, Proust tacitly invites readers to grapple with their conception of the distance between narrator and author.

The general critical tendency divided on whether to refer to Proust's narrator in the *Recherche* as "Marcel" or simply as "narrator," though his name does appear in the text. In a letter to the narrator in *La Prisonnière*, Albertine Simonet refers to him three times as "Marcel" (in addition to one oblique, coy reference). While somewhat more awkward to use, I use "narrator" instead of "Marcel" simply because the naming instances happens late in the novel's progression, so even if I am rereading, the narrator to me is just the narrator.[193] However, the overlap between the narrator and the author's names is an aspect of considerable weight in a text that plays with the notion of autobiography and naming, so I do not take this choice lightly.[194]

The play with absence and presence of names in the *Recherche* is especially provocative with reference to Wagner—a number of Wagnerian plots hinge around characters not knowing the names of themselves or others: When he meets his twin sister Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*,

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[192] Proust, *On Reading Ruskin*, xxii-xxiii.

[193] *La Prisonnière*, *Albertine disparue,* and *Le temps retrouvé* had not passed through a final edit by the time Proust died in 1922. Proust's edits were generally extensive, tending strongly toward removing the concrete references that had served as signposts during his writing process. Consequently, some critics hypothesize that Proust would have removed this reference had he not died before revisions were complete. I am less concerned with this dimension of the argument, but use narrator because it seems more natural to me to do so.

[194] This is also my stance on references in the *Divina Commedia* to Dante the pilgrim, who has a similarly demure one-time name reveal in the trilogy. I prefer to refer to him as the pilgrim. However, I certainly understand why some choose to refer to him as Dante, and to Proust's narrator as Marcel.

Siegmund conceals his identity, telling her his name is "Wehwalt," because of all he has suffered. Lohengrin's central plot conceit is that his identity must never be known he has instructed Elsa not to ask him his name, and when she finally does, he leaves and she slumps over dead. Isolde does not initially recognize Tristan as the "Tantris" she healed. Parsifal does not know his name until Kundry tells him. Tannhäuser is the star of the eponymous opera, but everyone in the opera refers to him as Heinrich. Withheld, unknown, and shifting names in Wagner often signal the promise of transformation for a character, and likewise, in the *Recherche*, some individuals' names change as their fortunes rise—such as Mme Verdurin eventually becoming the Princesse de Guermantes. Proust problematizes names by using authentic and fictionalized names of people and places to blur the presentation of reality and fiction. The narrator muses at length about names throughout the *Recherche,* noting in *Le temps retrouvé* that names can be the only elements that remain for us for a person, even while they are still living.

Forging the ring

Structurally, there is no better model for the *Recherche* as a whole than Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen*. A circular narrative that ends at its beginning, it takes as its subjects the light topics of oaths and betrayal, creation and destruction, gods and men, families and enemies, birth and death, nature and artifice, transformation across matter. As a work of theater, it breaks boundaries and expectations and even, possibly, audience stamina. In the narrator's meditation on Wagner's process (during a longer meditation on the overlap between Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and the Vinteuil sonata), he nods in particular toward the creation of this gigantic work:

> L'autre musicien, celui qui me ravissait en ce moment, Wagner, tirant de ses tiroirs un morceau délicieux pour le faire entrer comme thème rétrospectivement nécessaire dans une œuvre à laquelle il ne songeait pas au moment où il l'avait composé, puis ayant composé un premier opéra mythologique, puis un second, puis d'autres encore, et s'apercevant tout à coup qu'il venait de faire une tétralogie, dut éprouver un peu de la même ivresse que Balzac quand, jetant sur ses ouvrages le regard à la fois d'un étranger et d'un père, trouvant à celui-ci la pureté de Raphaël, à cet autre la simplicité de l'Évangile, il s'avisa brusquement, en projetant sur eux une illumination rétrospective, qu'ils seraient plus beaux réunis en un cycle où les mêmes personnages reviendraient, et ajouta à son œuvre, en ce raccord, un coup de pinceau, le dernier et le plus sublime.[195]

Even while commenting on Wagner's musico-dramatic practices, however, Proust blends registers, bringing in references from prose and painting in the form of Balzac and Raphaël. In so doing, he models precisely what he is doing in adapting Wagner into book format—beyond simply drawing together the narrative or musical strands of a circular epic, Proust works with literary, artistic, and musical sources as he forges his heptology. For Proust also possesses Wagner's "habileté vulcanienne" to join these disparate references into a single work. Proust's forge smelts just with music and literary themes, however; he takes as his molten material all the world's cultural references as he forges his masterwork.

To return to Bakhtin's definition of the novel as heterogeneous by design, the specification that "speech types" could expand to includes media outside the text and autobiography, this is precisely the articulation of the Wagnerian novel. In this endeavor, Proust, like d'Annunzio, leans heavily upon identifiable cultural figures and artifacts to dress his set. The massive span of the real-life system of references in the Recherche has helped to generate vast indices and a host of critical works. Due to both Proust's gigantic span of references and the novel's extraordinary size, criticism has often, of necessity, focused on individual facets of his

[195] Proust, *III*, 666-667.

artistic presentations: *Painting in Proust*, *Proust as Musician*, *Proust was a Neuroscientist*, *Proust playwright*, *Proust and Joyce in Dialogue* are just a few of their number. However, the focus on individual artistic genres that encounter the novel sometimes obscures the broader landscape: that this range of references work not alone, but in concert, to build the work's multimedia texture. Joshua Gidding, in "HyperProust," categorizes Proust's multimedia aspect as "characteristically synesthetic"—noting the broad range of sensory material that sparks episodes of involuntary memory: "the madeleine, the steeples of Martinville, the Vinteuil sonata, the death of Bergotte, and the final cosmic barrage at the Princesse de Guermantes' matinée—(which) invoke the faculties of vision, hearing, touch, and taste (therefore also of smell), each one coupled with its associated memories."[196]

Among existing criticism, Emile Bedriomo's *Proust, Wagner, et la coïncidence des arts* comes closest to defining Proust's crowd of references as the markers of a larger, Wagnerian project. However, there are several dimensions missing from this analysis, and these remaining dimensions help bind Proust's narrative technique particularly tightly to Wagner's aims. These are the book, clothing, the city of Venice, and the actress Berma. Berma is a particularly common omission from examinations of the artists of the Recherche: in *Proust as Musician*, Jean-Jacques Nattiez notes that "it is well known that there are three imaginary creative artists in the work of Proust: the writer Bergotte, the painter Elstir, and the composer Vinteuil."[197] He singles out Vinteuil's works as the only imaginary creations that travel through the *Recherche* as a whole.

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[196] Gidding, "HyperProust," *Proust in Perspective,* 272.

[197] Bedriomo, *Proust, Wagner, et la coïncidence des arts*, 8.

There is a tendency among some who write about Proust to distinguish among hierarchical lines the artist characters of the novel who conjure their creations from the void (Vinteuil, Elstir, Bergotte) and those who are "merely" interpreters or conduits of other arts (Berma, Morel). Howard Moss notes in *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*[198] that the others are "none of them creative artists in the same sense as Vinteuil, Bergotte, and Elstir," though he does at least give Berma special mention. This hierarchy often follows the prescriptions of Schopenhauer. In examining a text of this length and complexity, it makes sense to streamline one's field of content by any means necessary, but the role of interpretation is central to the creation of meaning in the *Recherche*, so omitting performers whose role is interpretation doesn't make a great deal of sense. Both the narrator and Swann, whom he idolizes, are cultural critics. The narrator, like Proust himself, is working on a piece on the English author John Ruskin, and Swann is working on a piece of criticism on the artist Vermeer. Though the narrator eventually conceptualizes the work of the novel itself, even this broader project is itself a wide-ranging interpretation of the narrator's own surroundings and the world at large. Interpretation and criticism are crucial components of the experience of art in the *Recherche*. I would add to this that these "interpretative" performers also highlight the necessity of embodiment for theater and music to take place, at least in an initial iteration. With a thematic assist from *Il fuoco*'s prioritization of the body of the female actress, in concert with the other bodies of actresses upon which Proust's the narrator is fixated, the role of Berma seems especially important.. This study engages the dialogue between Berma and the artistic categories named above (fashion, Venice,

[198] Moss, *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*, 7.

the book) in conversation with the "higher" arts (literature, music, painting) as a prime component of Proust's theatrical novel.

Body and book

One of the most fascinating dimensions of the *Recherche* is the degree to which Proust draws the material form of the book into the narrator's musings about art, life, and communication. In the first lines of the text, the narrator's book is a prop in his nightly ritual, an accessory to the process of dreaming. Proust will bring the relationship between art and dreams to the foreground in different ways throughout the narrative—there are thirteen dreams that appear in the text in some form, plus several more abstract meditations on the function of dreams. In the opening lines, however, the connection between text and narrative identity is explicit. What is particularly striking in this is that the idea of physical presence is charged from the outset: the narrator invokes the physical presence of the book, but the book is only one the sleepy protagonist *imagines* to be in his hands.

> Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure. Parfois, à peine ma bougie éteinte, mes yeux se fermaient si vite que je n'avais pas le temps de me dire: "Je m'endors." Et, une demi-heure après, la pensée qu'il était temps de chercher le sommeil m'éveillait; je voulais poser le volume que je croyais avoir encore dans les mains et souffler ma lumière; je n'avais pas cessé en dormant de faire des réflexions sur ce que je venais de lire, mais ces réflexions avaient pris un tour un peu particulier; il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage: une église, un quatuor, la rivalité de François Ier et de Charles-Quint. Cette croyance survivait pendant quelques secondes à mon réveil; elle ne choquait pas ma raison, mais pesait comme des écailles sur mes yeux et les empêchait de se rendre compte que le bougeoir n'était pas allumé. Puis elle commençait à me devenir inintelligible, comme après la métempsycose les pensées d'une existence antérieure; le as sujet du livre se détachait de moi, j'étais libre de m'y appliquer ou non; aussitôt je recouvrais la vue et j'étais bien étonné de trouver autour de moi une obscurité, douce et reposante pour mes yeux, mais peut-être plus encore pour mon esprit, à qui elle

> apparaissait comme une chose sans cause, incompréhensible, comme une chose vraiment obscure.[199]

This is an extraordinary opening gambit for a novel that problematizes time, physicality, and endurance. The primary asset of the material form of the book (particularly in comparison with the ephemerality of performance) is that it is has a physical substance that can, at least in part, resist the mutations of time. However, as soon as Proust introduces this physical form, he swiftly divests it of its physicality. Sleepily untethered from the phantom book's material reality and his own body, Proust's narrator protagonist merges with the possible subjects of the book, using a church, a quartet, a historical quarrel to frame his identity. As consciousness and, subsequently, sensory awareness return to the narrator, his identity is freed from the holds of the imaginary book, empowered to reconstitute itself using the book or not, as he chooses. This is a radical idea —the imagined book becomes a portal through which, even in its absence, the dream self can transform itself and take on diverse physical forms according to its desires. Has a more appealing hymn of praise to the power of reading ever been written? The self can take so many forms: buildings, music, historical encounters, all of which combine to form the Wagnerian stage work. Proust will use this very set of subject material (buildings, music, history) as foundation points upon which to build the his fictional narrative.

In the opening scene of *Du côté du chez Swann*, the narrator's dream state binds subject identity to story, but once the subject is awake, Proust also brings forth the idea of another physical retainer of memory: the body:

> Toujours est-il que, quand je me réveillais ainsi, mon esprit s'agitant pour chercher, sans y réussir, à savoir où j'étais, tout tournait autour de moi dans l'obscurité, les choses, les

[199] Proust, *I*, 3.

> pays, les années. Mon corps, trop engourdi pour remuer, cherchait, d'après la forme de sa fatigue, à repérer la position de ses membres pour en induire la direction du mur, la place des meubles, pour reconstruire et pour nommer la demeure où il se trouvait. Sa mémoire, la mémoire de ses côtes, de ses genoux, de ses épaules, lui présentait successivement plusieurs des chambres où il avait dormi, tandis qu'autour de lui les murs invisibles, changeant de place selon la forme de la pièce imaginée, tourbillonnaient dans les ténèbres. Et avant même que ma pensée, qui hésitait au seuil des temps et des formes, eût identifié le logis en rapprochant les circonstances, lui, — mon corps, — se rappelait pour chacun le genre du lit, la place des portes, la prise de jour des fenêtres, l'existence d'un couloir, avec la pensée que j'avais en m'y endormant et que je retrouvais au réveil. Mon côté ankylosé, cherchant à deviner son orientation, s'imaginait, par exemple, allongé face au mur dans un grand lit à baldaquin, et aussitôt je me disais : « Tiens, j'ai fini par m'endormir quoique maman ne soit pas venue me dire bonsoir », j'étais à la campagne chez mon grand-père, mort depuis bien des années ; et mon corps, le côté sur lequel je reposais, gardiens fidèles d'un passé que mon esprit n'aurait jamais dû oublier, me rappelaient la flamme de la veilleuse de verre de Bohême, en forme d'urne, suspendue au plafond par des chaînettes, la cheminée en marbre de Sienne, dans ma chambre à coucher de Combray, chez mes grands-parents, en des jours lointains qu'en ce moment je me figurais actuels sans me les représenter exactement, et que je reverrais mieux tout à l'heure quand je serais tout à fait éveillé.[200]

Here, bodily positioning begets architectural surroundings, which beget memory. But almost immediately thereafter, the body serves not only as a conjurer of memory, but also as source of creation: "Quelquefois, comme Ève naquit d'une côte d'Adam, une femme naissait pendant mon sommeil d'une fausse position de ma cuisse." [201] The body: compass of the present, procreator of the future (notably asexual), and repository for the past. The body joins the aforementioned cluster of dynamics: book, building, music, history that will intertwine throughout the narrative as sites of creation, as well as memory and identity building. Like the Wagnerian *Vorspiel* that sets the thematic content for the musical drama, Proust's opening passage sets the symbolic itinerary for this chapter.

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[200] Proust, *I*, 6.

[201] Proust, *I*, 4.

Scenic artists

In *Il fuoco*, d'Annunzio establishes a practice of using a dense texture of artistic references as a stage for narrative action. Art and architecture punctuate the narrative of *Il fuoco*, offering set dressing, symbolic resonance, and acoustic information. In his allegorical speech at the Palazzo Ducale, Effrena makes this point explicitly: visual artworks communicate many layers of meaning. Some of these works serve primarily as points of reference that extend from narrator to reader—communicating details to the audience, but not to the characters within the story (the angels on the bell towers of San Marco and San Giorgio Maggiore, for instance). More provocative are the scenes in which the art exerts an impact both on the characters within the text and the reader witnesses it: Effrena's staging at the Palazzo Ducale, "avendo per fondo il Paradiso del Tintoretto e sul capo la Gloria del Veronese."[202] Visual art also occasionally functions explicitly within a plot point, such as in Foscarina's contemplation of Giorgione's *Vecchia* at the Accademia of Venice. But d'Annunzio employs the visual arts primarily through their ability to represent events or mythology (paintings), their suggestion of remaining fixed rather than transient (sculpture, architecture, and jewels) or unusually, in the case of Murano's blown glass, its fragility. The visual arts can offer an opportunity for contemplation or repose, or occasionally even inspiration, but it is performance, particularly musical performance, that has the power to transform.

In the *Recherche*, art plays a more direct role for the characters themselves, who use visual art as building blocks for the construction of the self. What is particularly remarkable in the *Recherche* is that the contemplation of art is used not as an adjunct to more "meaningful"

[202] D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*, 9.

Gentile Bellini, *Mehmet II*, 1480.

experience, but as the experience proper. Visual art also serves as the provocation for both writerly interest and personal experiences. In the *Recherche*, art offers the possibility of apotheosis for its subjects, its creators, and its viewers. While d'Annunzio uses his observation of art to frame his characters lives for his readers, Proust stages his characters doing this work for themselves. Beyond Françoise, the Michelangelo of les Halles, we also have Charlus who sees Bloch as Bellini's *Mehmet II* and Swann, who sees Odette as Botticelli's "Zipporah." [203] This chain of correlation works in the opposite direction, too—the artworks become marked by their associations with Proust's characters. Eric Karpeles' compilation *Paintings in Proust* offers an illuminating framework for observing both the breadth and precision of Proust's set of referents in the *Recherche*: 206 illustrations are presented side by side with the passages that reference them. Karpeles does not aim at attaining perfect completeness or concision in his collection, but he brings attention to the fact that, rather than quarantining artworks in the sterile confines of the museum, Proust breaks them out, attaching them to all facets of daily activities.

Detail of Zipporah, from Sandro Botticelli, *Prove di Mosè*, 1481-1482.

[203] Proust owned a copy of John Ruskin's *Mornings in Florence* with a frontispiece of Ruskin's own watercolor study of Botticelli's Zipporah. (Karpeles, *Paintings in Proust*, 331-332.)

Mariano Fortuny y Madrazos: A Carpaccio in the bedroom

> — Vous pourrez peut-être bientôt, lui dit Elstir, contempler les étoffes merveilleuses qu'on portait là-bas. On ne les voyait plus que dans les tableaux des peintres vénitiens, ou alors très rarement dans les trésors des églises, parfois même il y en avait une qui passait dans une vente. Mais on dit qu'un artiste de Venise, Fortuny, a retrouvé le secret de leur fabrication et qu'avant quelques années les femmes pourront se promener, et surtout rester chez elles, dans des brocarts aussi magnifiques que ceux que Venise ornait, pour ses patriciennes, avec des dessins d'Orient.[204]

With Proust's investment in the granular details of staging life, it is natural that he renders the clothing of the *Recherche*'s cast with a fine brush. Wagner himself had famously specific preferences for fabric not only for the stage, but for home—his reveled in his sister's theatrical costumes as a child and gave the guests at his first wedding pink silk handkerchiefs, his favorite.[205] In Proust's effort to shape the quotidian along the contours of high art, there could be no finer ally than the latter day Renaissance man Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo. Born in Spain but based in Venice, Fortuny was a painter, fashion designer, theatrical innovator, and devoted Wagnerian who offered the ideal outlet for the ways in which the material trappings of daily life could not just imitate, but resurrect art. Fortuny's dresses in the *Recherche* help to shift the characters' (and readers') artistic perception of the ordinary. Fortuny's dresses offer a conduit not only into art in general, but into the aristocratic life of the Italian Renaissance, and into the world of Venice.[206]

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[204] Proust, *II*, 252-253.

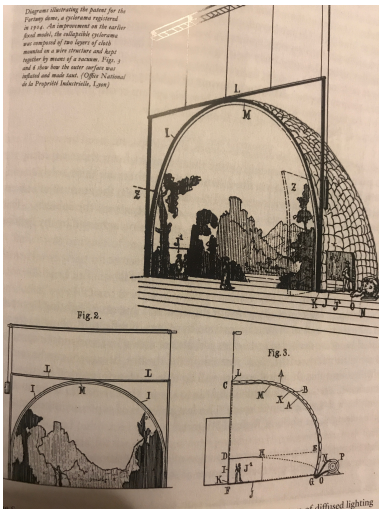
[205] Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse,* 141.

[206] Collier, *Proust and Venice,* 79.

In addition to re-envisioning and reconstructing dresses from antiquity, as a theatrical designer and producer, Fortuny was particularly attentive to the ways in which set construction influenced production value. Unsurprisingly, as a devout fan of Wagner, he championed a form of theater in which the production team took on a unified approach. He dressed Duse, along with most of the fashionable women of the era (including the comtesse de Greffuhle). He was a friend and collaborator with d'Annunzio as well, projecting a custom theater to meet the poet's grandiose specifications:

> It will be made entirely of iron and will take seven days to set up completely. It will contain 4,500 seats, placed in an amphitheater, adorned with flower baskets and with little boxes covered in velvet. The stage will be semi-spherical: a kind of balloon cut in two. The first night will be June 20, 1911, in front of the Invalides or the Champs de Mars. The first performance will be of a mammoth collection of verses of Gabriele d'Annunzio, with dances, chorus, and songs. The orchestra will have 120 players. Over 700 actors will appear on stage. The plan is to give three months of performances in Paris, after which the theater will visit other European capitals.[207]

Fortuny was also famed for his innovations in theatrical stagecraft, particularly lighting, which he fused with scenic painting to create dramatic effects.[208]



Mariano Fortuny y Madrazos, *Diagrams illustrating the patent for the Fortuny dome*, 1904.

[207] Rhodes, *The Poet as Superman*, 156.

[208] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theater*, 193.

While many of Wagner's admirers were engaged in the creation of music, theater, or literature, Fortuny's convictions as a designer of clothes and lights for the stage are particularly useful for Proust's narrative purposes. Because Fortuny's works spanned both professional theater and works for the general public, his own professional practice quite literally involved adorning the quotidian both with works drawn from the history of art, and from the trappings of the stage. Proust frames this resemblance of life to art in terms of its novelistic value:

> De toutes les robes ou robes de chambre que portait Mme de Guermantes, celles qui semblaient le plus répondre à une intention déterminée, être pourvues d'une signification spéciale, c'étaient ces robes que Fortuny a faites d'après d'antiques dessins de Venise. Est-ce leur caractère historique, est-ce plutôt le fait que chacune est unique qui lui donne un caractère si particulier que la pose de la femme qui les porte en vous attendant, en causant avec vous, prend une importance exceptionnelle, comme si ce costume avait été le fruit d'une longue délibération et comme si cette conversation se détachait de la vie courante comme une scène de roman ? Dans ceux de Balzac, on voit des héroïnes revêtir à dessein telle ou telle toilette, le jour où elles doivent recevoir tel visiteur. Les toilettes d'aujourd'hui n'ont pas tant de caractère, exception faite pour les robes de Fortuny. Aucun vague ne peut subsister dans la description du romancier, puisque cette robe existe réellement, que les moindres dessins en sont aussi naturellement fixés que ceux d'une œuvre d'art. Avant de revêtir celle-ci ou celle-là, la femme a eu à faire un choix entre deux robes, non pas à peu près pareilles, mais profondément individuelles chacune, et qu'on pourrait nommer. Mais la robe ne n'empêchait pas de penser à la femme.[209]

The painter Elstir, with his professionally cultivated eye, had noted that there is no one in Paris who dresses so well as Mme de Guermantes, and here Fortuny takes on the role of her most noted artist of adornment. But here he also takes on the explicit role of furnishing dressing for the novelist, as well—Proust comments specifically on the ability of the art of the dress to stand

[209] Proust, *III*, 543.

in for novelistic description.[210] Proust's commentary on his deployment of Fortuny in the *Recherche* is instructive to take into account for his (and d'Annunzio's) use of extensive general artistic citations, as well—the novelist may focus on other descriptive tasks if the room's decor is provided by Carpaccio.

Fortuny is not only a costume designer for the text, his work also serves as a plot point. In his quest to sophisticate Albertine, the narrator buys her six Fortuny dresses. The placement in which the narrator discusses the Fortuny dresses, that is to say the material objects that he has already discussed in terms of their novelistic reality effect, is particularly interesting. It comes directly after the passage in which the narrator's beloved, Albertine, famously uses the narrator's name. Albertine and Marcel have a relationship fraught with jealousy and suspicion, and Marcel actively seeks to make her more appropriate as a partner. His purchase of the dresses is one of these such attempts.

> J'éprouvai un vif mouvement de reconnaissance pour Albertine qui, je le voyais, n'était pas allée au Trocadéro pour les amies de Léa, et qui me montrait, en quittant la matinée et en rentrant sur un signe de moi, qu'elle m'appartenait plus que je ne me le figurais. Il fut plus grand encore quand un cycliste me porta un mot d'elle pour que je prisse patience, et où il y avait de ces gentilles expressions qui lui étaient familières : « Mon chéri et cher Marcel, j'arrive moins vite que ce cycliste dont je voudrais bien prendre la bécane pour être plus tôt près de vous. Comment pouvez-vous croire que je puisse être fâchée et que quelque chose puisse m'amuser autant que d'être avec vous ! ce sera gentil de sortir tous les deux, ce serait encore plus gentil de ne jamais sortir que tous les deux. Quelles idées vous faites-vous donc ? Quel Marcel ! Quel Marcel ! Toute à vous, ton Albertine. »[211]

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[210] The recognition of Fortuny as an aid to novelistic description is another shared dimension between Proust and d'Annunzio, who invokes Fortuny in *Forse che sì, forse che no* (1910), presenting the protagonist Henriette wearing an early version of the dress: "Ella era avvolta in una di quelle lunghissime sciarpe di garza orientale che il tintore alchimista Mariano Fortuny immerge nelle conce misteriose dei suoi vagelli rimosse col pilo di legno ora da un silfo ora da uno gnomo e le ritrae tinte di strani sogni e poi vi stampa co' suoi mille bussetti nuove generazioni di astri, di piante, di animali." (D'Annunzio, *Forse che sì, forse che no*, 269.)

[211] Proust, *III*, 583.

The narrator actively builds Albertine into the proper subject he imagines for his personal narrative. As he costumes her to fit her role, Albertine's interpolated written words refocus the reader's eye upon the narrator's own character. Using the carefully constructed artifices of clothing, the narrator seeks to redesign the character of Albertine around a more "suitable" set of criteria. However, with the triple repetition of his name, "Marcel", it is Albertine's note that constructs the narrator, linking him at least superficially back to Proust himself. Bookended by references to Fortuny, the triple revelation of the narrator's name as "Marcel" in the note from Albertine, also draws the dynamic of revelation and concealment into sharp focus.

The related process of staging and performance is intensified in Marcel's commentary later on Albertine's collections, and how Fortuny plays a role in them:

> Elle avait même commencé de jolies collections, qu'elle installait avec un goût charmant dans une vitrine et que je ne pouvais regarder sans attendrissement et sans crainte, car l'art avec lequel elle les disposait était celui fait de patience, d'ingéniosité, de nostalgie, de besoin d'oublier, auquel se livrent les captifs. Pour les toilettes, ce qui lui plaisait surtout à ce moment, c'était tout ce que faisait Fortuny. Ces robes de Fortuny, dont j'avais vu l'une sur Mme de Guermantes, c'était celles dont Elstir, quand il nous parlait des vêtements magnifiques des contemporaines de Carpaccio et du Titien, nous avait annoncé la prochaine apparition, renaissant de leurs cendres, somptueuses, car tout doit revenir comme il est écrit aux voûtes de Saint-Marc, et comme le proclament, buvant aux urnes de marbre et de jaspe des chapiteaux byzantins, les oiseaux qui signifient à la fois la mort et la résurrection. Dès que les femmes avaient commencé à en porter, Albertine s'était rappelé les promesses d'Elstir, elle en avait désiré, et nous devions aller en choisir une. Or ces robes, si elles n'étaient pas de ces véritables robes anciennes, dans lesquelles les femmes aujourd'hui ont un peu trop l'air costumées et qu'il est plus joli de garder comme pièces de collection (j'en cherchais, d'ailleurs, aussi de telles pour Albertine), n'avaient pas non plus la froideur du pastiche, du faux ancien. À la façon des décors de Sert, de Bakst et de Benoist, qui, à ce moment, évoquaient dans les ballets russes les époques d'art les plus aimées — à l'aide d'œuvres d'art imprégnées de leur esprit et pourtant originales — ces robes de Fortuny, fidèlement antiques mais puissamment originales, faisaient apparaître comme un décor, avec une plus grande force d'évocation même qu'un décor, puisque le décor restait à imaginer, la Venise tout

> encombrée d'Orient où elles auraient été portées, dont elles étaient, mieux qu'une relique dans la châsse de Saint-Marc évocatrice du soleil et des turbans environnants, la couleur fragmentée, mystérieuse et complémentaire. Tout avait péri de ce temps, mais tout renaissait, évoqué pour les relier entre elles par la splendeur du paysage et le grouillement de la vie, par le surgissement parcellaire et survivant des étoffes des dogaresses. J'avais voulu une ou deux fois demander à ce sujet conseil à Mme de Guermantes. Mais la duchesse n'aimait guère les toilettes qui font costume.[212]

Fortuny expresses the ideal balance of art's power: his works conjure of the spirit of the past while creating something entirely new, which transforms the world around it. The message of rebirth is particularly powerful, as it promises new beginnings while remaining tied to the specificity of the past. This sense of evocation and rebirth is present in multiple layers in the narrative here, not only referencing the narrative world's own Elstir, but also the real figures of Carpaccio, Titian, and Venice itself. The stones of Venice, "marbe" et "jaspe," are both the holders of relics and the sites of decor for human performances, such as those conjured by the theatrical set designers Sert, Bakst, and Benoist. Venice and Fortuny serve as set dressing as well, and their evocations prompt both action and transformation. The narrator dresses Albertine dressed in Fortuny, but her wearing Fortuny also leads the narrator away from her — in thinking of the ways in which she prevents him from seeing his long-desired Venice.

Fortuny: obsession, fulfillment, absence

The simultaneous distancing and attraction of Fortuny and Albertine is most prominent in the narrator's trip to Venice, after his break with Albertine and her death. The narrator catches sight of Fortuny's inspiration and is once again brought back to her.

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[212] Proust, *III*, 871.

> Mais tout à coup le décor changea ; ce ne fut plus le souvenir d'anciennes impressions, mais d'un ancien désir, tout récemment réveillé encore par la robe bleu et or de Fortuny, qui étendit devant moi un autre printemps, un printemps non plus du tout feuillu mais subitement dépouillé, au contraire, de ses arbres et de ses fleurs par ce nom que je venais de me dire : Venise [...] Aussi bien, pas plus que les saisons à ses bras de mer infleurissables, les modernes années n'apportent de changement à la cité gothique ; je le savais, je ne pouvais l'imaginer, mais voilà ce que je voulais contempler, de ce même désir qui jadis, quand j'étais enfant, dans l'ardeur même du départ, avait brisé en moi la force de partir ; je voulais me trouver face à face avec mes imaginations vénitiennes ; voir comment cette mer divisée enserrait de ses méandres, comme les replis du fleuve Océan, une civilisation urbaine et raffinée, mais qui, isolée par leur ceinture azurée, s'était développée à part, avait eu à part ses écoles de peinture et d'architecture ; admirer ce jardin fabuleux de fruits et d'oiseaux de pierre de couleur, fleuri au milieu de la mer, qui venait le rafraîchir, frappait de son flux le fût des colonnes et, sur le puissant relief des chapiteaux, comme un regard de sombre azur qui veille dans l'ombre, posait par taches et fait remuer perpétuellement la lumière.[213]

During his relationship with Albertine, Venice takes on the role of a desire that is unobtainable in part because of Albertine herself. The narrator's desire for the city is thus doubly charged—an unobtainable desire made unobtainable because of another unfulfillable desire. When Marcel dresses Albertine in Fortuny, he dresses one unobtainable desire in the reflection of another. The material "robe bleu" offers the illusion of fulfillment.

Because of Fortuny's shared inspirations with Proust: classical forms, mythical sources, Wagner, the dresses he creates are particularly adept at conveying life as a seamless series of artistic encounters, a through-composed multimedia epic. Distinct from Wagner and d'Annunzio, however, Proust and Fortuny engage the theatricality and potential for artistic union equally on the theatrical stage as in the quiet rituals of daily life. Fortuny neatly weaves together several of the dominant themes in the *Recherche*--theatricality, art adapted into the tools of daily life, life imitating art, the presentation of self through dress: that is to say, the assimilation of all aspects

[213] Proust, *III*, 871.

of life to the aesthetic precepts set forth by Wagner. Fortuny's fame as an innovative lamp and lighting designer holds resonance with the narrator's own magic lamp, and with the use of light and shadow in storytelling. Fortuny also serves as an artistic conduit to the novel's set designers and interior designers, who use the aesthetic arrangement of the house to frame the narrative of the clients.

The Fortuny woman

Beyond the many facets that comprise the category "theatrical", one additional area in which Fortuny shares Wagner's preoccupations is in the intimate relationship his work naturally has with the female body. Fortuny's most renowned dresses spanned a surprising variety of styles, some large and cloak like, with heavy fabrics that resemble those in paintings of the Italian Renaissance.[214]

Dresses, Museo Fortuny, Venice.

[214] Though she was said to be a particular fan of Fortuny, there is only one piece by the designer in the exhibition *La Mode Retrouvée: Les robes trésors de la comtesse Greffulhe*, a coat that, though short, falls within this opulent, more antiquated style.

But some of Fortuny's most famous dresses, particularly in the era in which the *Recherche* was published, were the *Delphos* and the *Peplos*, both originally worn as house dresses. By the 20s, were worn out in fashionable society. The *Delphos* was constructed through a riot of pleats made by Fortuny's proprietary process. It came in one size—its pleats, assisted by the weight of glass beads sewn into the seams, could expand and contract to adapt to the nuances of many individual figures.[215] This technique also had the advantage of using gravity to draw the dress close to the body. The emphasis on a dress that reveals the body's shape hearkens back to the representation of myth on canvas and sculpture — Fortuny indeed modeled his dresses from paintings of Greek and Roman myth. By dressing women in the clothing of Galatea, Fortuny helps hybridize life and art. The close fit of the Delphos and Peplos also suggests the contamination of the categories of public and private: what was once only revealed within the home is now celebrated, offered up for public viewing.

Mariano Fortuny y Madrazos, *Delphos dress*, circa 1909-1920.

[215] In a parallel instance of concealment and revelation, no one has ever successfully recreated or duplicated Fortuny's pleating technique. A trade secret to this day, modern conservators only guess at what the process entailed. Fortuny *Delphos* dresses are rabidly collected and sell for extraordinary sums.

Fortuny and the theater of life

Fortuny also offers an alternative point of entry into Proust's use of Venice as a staging device. Because the *Recherche* actively builds meaning into all architectural and geographical references, Proust's choice of blending both fictionalized and real locations is particularly notable. While the landmarks of Paris and Venice are true to the map, Combray, Balbec, and many of the smaller towns that Proust uses as points of reference are fictionalized at least in name, though their real-world counterparts are often identifiable.[216] While the blending of identifiably true-to-life and pseudonymous architectural references bears influence on Proust's general approach of revelation and concealment, Venice is of particular interest to this study, not only because of its echoes with both d'Annunzio and Wagner, but also because it is a city that the narrator has actively fetishized before he encounters it. The narrator's travel to Venice, at the end of *La Prisonnière*, caps off the middle section of the text, in which he has lost Albertine to death.

Everything about *Il fuoco*'s exposition is geared toward an aristocratic, cultivated individual. Effrena and all of his companions are are similarly privileged. Even among cultural equals, Effrena's artistic potential is exclusively his own domain: he is the "animatore" by definition. The artistic awakening he follows is not a generalizable process. Likewise, the barrage of imagery d'Annunzio uses in *Il fuoco* is more likely to attract a selective readership who will have knowledge of the many references he uses. With the exception of Effrena's offhand plan to offer free tickets at his proposed theater on the Gianicolo, it is generally evident that Effrena (or d'Annunzio) is unconcerned with reaching a wide audience.

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[216] In an interesting twist of literary-geographical history that mirrors the Wagnerian resonance Bayreuth has taken on, Illiers, Proust's model for Combray, now is officially called Illiers-Combray.

In contrast, like a Homeric simile that blends the gore of war with the universal dimensions of agriculture or nature, Proust's juxtaposition of elevated cultural references with elements from daily life increases access to both components. Proust's cultural erudition thus reads more like an invitation than a locked door. The *Recherche* valorizes the cultivation of desire for works and places celebrated by others, and allows these desires to bear fruit productively throughout the course of the narrative.

All of the *Recherche* is a chronicle of the rising and falling social fortunes of the families close to the narrator, Proust certainly concerns himself with the lifestyles of the rich and famous. However, the fact that he documents social mobility in both directions potentially leaves it open to a wider audience, and there is the possibility (if only illusory) of charting one's own progress through growth. Because narrative identities in the *Recherche* are constructed and refined through sharing cultural capital in conversation, the desire to learn more about the many references in the text is thus a factor that is tacitly encouraged in Proust's readers as well.

The narrator's life itself is palpably shaped by the transference of cultural esteem; he acquires a desire for the city of Venice and the actress Berma based on the enthusiasm of others (Swann above all). Both of these lines of fetishization and pursuit run through the course of the narration without large gaps — references to Venice are in every volume and references to Berma exist in each volume save *Sodom et Gomorrah*. The narrator grows increasingly close to both references as the narrative progresses, moving from admiration by proxy to first-hand experience. The two reference points split Proust's presentation of real life (Venice) and fiction (Berma) in his narrative through-lines, and both references incorporate Proust's multimedia approach. Venice supplies not only fodder for Proust's obsession with places (churches above

all), but also art and local sound. Berma offers material not only for the narrator's fixation with people, celebrity, and theater, but also the engagement with the theatrical literature that she performs. I will investigate each of these points of reference in the following sections.

Staging Venice redux

Venice is unique among the locations outside of Paris in the text, as most are fictional. While Paris anchors much of the narrative action, as it is the narrator's primary residence, travel is vital in the construction of his identity. From the earliest narrative moments, travel, particularly repeated travel, serves as a point of fixation. Trains figure heavily and the idea of traveling to gain cultural exposure is a prime motivating factor for many among the characters Proust presents. Venice's unique position in the narrative is evident from its first appearance, as the narrator describes its place in his esteem. Interestingly, he only ever goes to Venice once, and though he visits all the other locations of his catalogue multiple times in the text, Venice still features highly. In his passage on dreaming at the beginning of *Du Côté de chez Swann* the narrator awakens and gives a brief preview of coming attractions in his musings on place. Venice, despite the narrator's brief trip, receives top billing:

> j'avais beau savoir que je n'étais pas dans les demeures dont l'ignorance du réveil m'avait en un instant sinon présenté l'image distincte, du moins fait croire la présence possible, le branle était donné à ma mémoire ; généralement je ne cherchais pas à me rendormir tout de suite ; je passais la plus grande partie de la nuit à me rappeler notre vie d'autrefois à Combray chez ma grand'tante, à Balbec, à Paris, à Doncières, à Venise, ailleurs encore, à me rappeler les lieux, les personnes que j'y avais connues, ce que j'avais vu d'elles, ce qu'on m'en avait raconté.[217]

[217] Proust, *I*, 9.

Marcel first develops an interest in Venice through his admiration of Swann, who has brought photographs from his travels. Proust, like d'Annunzio, was a passionate collector of photographs and his access to these concrete visual points of reference serve to build the mosaic of imagery strewn throughout the text. But in the *Recherche* we have a double interweaving of filters for reception: Swann has brought back photographs of places for the narrator, but the narrator's grandmother prefers that he bring instead photographs of artworks based on places:

> Elle eût aimé que j'eusse dans ma chambre des photographies des monuments ou des paysages les plus beaux. Mais au moment d'en faire l'emplette, et bien que la chose représentée eût une valeur esthétique, elle trouvait que la vulgarité, l'utilité reprenaient trop vite leur place dans le mode mécanique de représentation, la photographie. Elle essayait de ruser et, sinon d'éliminer entièrement la banalité commerciale, du moins de la réduire, d'y substituer, pour la plus grande partie, de l'art encore, d'y introduire comme plusieurs « épaisseurs » d'art : au lieu de photographies de la Cathédrale de Chartres, des Grandes Eaux de Saint-Cloud, du Vésuve, elle se renseignait auprès de Swann si quelque grand peintre ne les avait pas représentés, et préférait me donner des photographies de la Cathédrale de Chartres par Corot, des Grandes Eaux de Saint-Cloud par Hubert Robert, du Vésuve par Turner, ce qui faisait un degré d'art de plus. Mais si le photographe avait été écarté de la représentation du chef-d'œuvre ou de la nature et remplacé par un grand artiste, il reprenait ses droits pour reproduire cette interprétation même. Arrivée à l'échéance de la vulgarité, ma grand'mère tâchait de la reculer encore. Elle demandait à Swann si l'œuvre n'avait pas été gravée, préférant, quand c'était possible, des gravures anciennes et ayant encore un intérêt au delà d'elles-mêmes, par exemple celles qui représentent un chef-d'œuvre dans un état où nous ne pouvons plus le voir aujourd'hui (comme la gravure de la Cène de Léonard avant sa dégradation, par Morgan). Il faut dire que les résultats de cette manière de comprendre l'art de faire un cadeau ne furent pas toujours très brillants. L'idée que je pris de Venise d'après un dessin du Titien qui est censé avoir pour fond la lagune, était certainement beaucoup moins exacte que celle que m'eussent donnée de simples photographies.[218]

This is an extraordinary meditation on the power of art to filter one's perception of reality. The narrator's grandmother's perception seems to almost gesture, in a skewed way, toward Walter Benjamin's essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," seeking to

[218] Proust, *I*, 40.

maintain the painterly aura of places, even if the artisanal optics are still transmitted by mechanical reproduction.[219] Thanks to his grandmother's aesthetic interventions, even with his initial exposure to Venice, Proust presents multiple layers of filter: first, the enthusiasm of Swann, colored by the warmth which which Marcel regards him; next, and the filter of Titian's eye, who preserves his image on paper; finally, the photograph itself. In a narrative in which all meaning is constructed through aesthetic filters, the narrator's grandmother's aesthetic preferences seems a perfect microcosm of the *Recherche*.

For many of the countless authors who use Venice as a stage for narrative, the artificial city's suspension over the water offers powerful resonance as a floating signifier. However, in the case of Proust, at least some of Venice's power in the novel lies in part in its concrete reality. Venice is one of the few places outside Paris that Marcel travels to that corresponds fully with the map—no literary detective work or re-naming committees necessary. Venice also supplies one of the text's few instances of desire realized. Venice first appears to Marcel as an object of fixation, based on his encounters with Swann and his fetishization of Italy and Italian art. When a childhood trip to Italy over Easter is cancelled by Marcel's parents in concern for his health, the city begins to operate within the realm of unrealized desires. It eventually becomes a point of recurrent fixation for the narrator. The narration builds the landmarks of Venice along similar lines as the landmarks of the fictional towns the narrator knows well, but in this case, access is provided to Venice's landmarks via art. In the case of Venice, art, filtered through the esteem of a person admired by the narrator (Swann), serves as flash point in sparking geographical desire. The desire is temporarily impeded, but when the narrator finally visits Venice, it fully lives up to

[219] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations.*

his expectations. Unlike desires for people, which are always (perhaps necessarily) left unfulfilled, the narrator's desire for Venice becomes a desire that is obtained.

The Venice of the narrator's imagination is very much the Venice of *Il fuoco*. It is populated with the same iconic references and physical landmarks. However, it is also the Venice of countless others, perhaps most notably English critic and artist John Ruskin. Just as d'Annunzio's self-citations in *Il fuoco* suture author to protagonist, Ruskin's presence among the narrator's obsessions in the *Recherche* facilitates conflation of the narrator and his author. While Swann toils on his ever-unfinished Vermeer article, the narrator is framed throughout as working on a piece about Ruskin, a subject of Proust's own publications. Consequently, the narrator's continuing references to Ruskin intensify the tension of authorial presentation within the text. Proust manipulates this dynamic to maximum effect, in part by using the narrator to expound about the futility of linking authors and their characters. The process of seeking out these cues to authorial identity leaves the reader with an exciting form of engagement with the text: narrative as detective work. However, like the narrator's unending desire for information about Albertine's private life, the reader's quest to conclusively isolate Proust in the narrator remain always unsolved.

Ruskin is not only pivotal in positioning the narrator and author in productive conversation, he also sets the architectural foundation for the examination of Venice, one of the ways in which both art and Venice fully deliver. Venice is diagrammed by Ruskin, and true to Proust's process of transference through art, Ruskin delivers for the narrator. Venice serves as an opportunity to explore art and criticism of art in order to better write about art. Art also enables the narrator to meditate on the role of fiction, depiction, and imitation in the quotidian—when

admiring a painting, the narrator sees both Fortuny's inspiration and the projection of Albertine in the clothes of Fortuny, a feedback loop of inspiration, artwork, application, and resemblance. In so doing, the representation of myth is unified with the trappings of daily life. With his many artists and artistic commentators, Proust also underscores power of criticism and commentary in reifying the impact of art.

Two moments of the narrator's trip to Venice are particularly striking within the narrative's theatrical frame. First, during his trip, the narrator receives a telegram from "Albertine" and learns that she is not dead, as he thought. He is surprisingly unmoved by this discovery. In one of the strangest revelations in the novel, the narrator subsequently learns, on the train ride back to Paris, that the telegram he received was not from Albertine, but from his friend (and childhood beloved) Gilberte, which additionally does not phase him to any particular degree. While I cannot venture a conclusive interpretation of this event, I will venture that perhaps the fulfillment offered by Venice in living up to the narrator's expectations has destabilized him to such a degree that even his corrosive fixation upon Albertine is blotted away. Does fulfilled desire inoculate the narrator temporarily against the ravages of unfulfillable desire? This seems one possibility.

Desire threatens to keep the narrator in Venice in the end, and this is when another strange moment occurs. When his mother leaves the hotel for the train to head home, Marcel wishes instead to stay because of the arrival of Madame Putbus, whose maid he obsesses about. As he remains at the hotel in defiance of his mother's wishes, he hears the song "O sole mio" being sung. Though the presence of traditional songs echoing through the canals are part of the

cliched charm of Venice, the narrator is not charmed.[220]. The thrills of Venice fade. But what is interesting is that he uses the song as a way of marking time:

> Sans doute ce chant insignifiant, entendu cent fois, ne m'intéressait nullement. Je ne pouvais faire plaisir à personne ni à moi-même en l'écoutant aussi religieusement jusqu'au bout. Enfin aucun des motifs, connues d'avance par moi, de cette vulgaire romance ne pouvait me fournir la résolution dont j'avais besoin ; bien plus, chacune de ces phrases, quand elle passait à son tour, devenait un obstacle à prendre efficacement cette résolution, ou plutôt elle m'obligeait à la résolution contraire de ne pas partir, car elle me faisait passer l'heure.[221]

These descriptions recall three prominent works by authors who lived in Italy: Augustine's *Confessions,* Francesco Petrarch's *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, and Dante Alighieri's *Commedia*. Each of these authors use music not to stop time, but to confirm its passage. But interestingly, while the narrator's folk song offers the chance for him to meditate on time and these authors' presentations of it, it is one of the few moments of Venice that is not aestheticized. The spell does not hold; the narrator returns to the train just in time to join his mother for their departure back to Paris. As John Coyle notes in "Ruskin, Proust, and the art of failure," "For Ruskin as for Proust, illumination is intermittent, and the writing of experience must reflect or enact this intermittence." [222]

The narrator's trip to Venice happens late in the narrative—just at the end of *Albertine disparue,* the sixth volume. And yet it is Venice that begins the text's famous last cascade of memory, that prompted by the cobblestones at the house of the Duc de Guermantes. The other memories are childhood memories, but Venice makes its way into this lineage even as a new

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[220] Though it is not a focal point of my current analysis, d'Annunzio's *Il fuoco* also employs folk song to punctuate the narrative, both as local color and as a counterpoint to the elevated operatic singing he highlights.

[221] Proust, *IV*, 231-233.

[222] Coyle, "Ruskin, Proust, and the art of failure," *Essays in Criticism,* 47.

memory. It serves as one of the definitive examples of a multifaceted, longstanding desire realized. Venice, site of years of fixation, transference, and fantasy is, in the end, gained.

Theater of stone, theater of words

In a text deeply invested in ideas of performance, it is unsurprising that theater and actresses plays prominent roles in the *Recherche*. Proust's portrayal of this domain also ties him to D'Annunzio's practices in *Il fuoco.* In *Il fuoco*, D'Annunzio, fully embracing Wagner's prescriptions for multimedia creation, enacts them, with some Italian translations, within the novel format. But d'Annunzio's novel is lopsided in its presentation, because though it is a manifesto in novel form, it is not a manifesto for a new form of novel, but for a new theatrical practice. Stelio's journey is always focused on the crowd, the witness, the adoring gaze. In contrast, Proust's narrator is characterized by his solitude—even when in groups, Proust's narrative strategies create a zone of reflection and introspection around the character. Proust's *Recherche* is broader in its textual volume than even d'Annunzio's early plans had predicted for the *Romanze del Melograno* series. Nonetheless, Proust and d'Annunzio share a marked overlap in their narrative tools. Proust redoubles the techniques d'Annunzio has established in *Il fuoco,* particularly d'Annunzio's use of artistic references to build identity and meaning. While d'Annunzio plays with the idea of performance, drawing upon Effrena and Foscarina's artistic processes involving embodiment and transformation, Proust's characters actively construct themselves with reference to the world's cultural treasures.

La Berma

A closer look at the *Recherche*'s top billed actress is useful in teasing apart the strands of narrative reception and creation in the novel. The actress Berma is an emblem of the narrator's musings on perception and reality—a marker of the subjectivity of the experience of live performance. As such, she dovetails perfectly with Wagner's anxieties surrounding the performance of his works.

The narrator's enthusiasm for Berma develops early in the first volume. He first frames his relationship to the theater as Platonic, since his parents would never consent to him attending But as will become the case with all of the narrator's passions, the inaccessibility of the theater only heightens his desire. He frames Berma as second only to Sarah Bernhardt in a list of his favorite actresses, conflating the fictional and narrative worlds.[223] Berma is also explicitly inaccessible to him because she is close to the narrator's uncle Adolphe, and thus tagged with the illicit by association. If Berma's accessibility didn't seal the thrill attached to her name, enthusiasm for her is cosigned by both Swann and the writer Bergotte. When the narrator questions Swann about Bergotte's tastes, he responds:

> «…je sais qu'il n'égale aucun artiste homme à la Berma qu'il met au-dessus de tout. L'avez-vous entendue ?
> — Non monsieur, mes parents ne me permettent pas d'aller au théâtre.
> — C'est malheureux. Vous devriez leur demander. La Berma dans *Phèdre*, dans *le Cid*,

[223] Though I don't want to venture too far down the rabbit hole of narrative inspiration, in light of this particular examination, it seems germane to mention my surprise that, as far as I am aware, no one has set forth Eleonora Duse as one of the possible models for Berma. Duse was always in competition with Bernhardt; she was particularly worried about being perceived as coming in second to her. Perhaps the facts that Berma specializes in Racine and there is no mention of her having an accent tag her as unimpeachably French. However, it still seems striking that, given the narrator's obsession with theater, Duse isn't ever mentioned, as she performed frequently in Paris. The lack of Duse in the narrative, alongside Berma's resemblances to her, might encourage some projection of the actress into the text.

> ce n'est qu'une actrice si vous voulez, mais vous savez je ne crois pas beaucoup à la «hiérarchie!» des arts. [...]
> Un instant après il ajouta: «Cela vous donnera une vision aussi noble que n'importe quel chef-d'œuvre, je ne sais pas moi… que » — et il se mit à rire — «les Reines de Chartres!»[224]

Swann's laughing derision for the hierarchy of arts that would place music above all others frames his presentation of Berma's talent—it is particularly interesting that critics of art in the *Recherche* tend to follow along precisely with the hierarchy that Swann finds so laughable. Berma's art is interpretive, performative, and verbal, and it requires both subtle control of the body, the emotions, and the mind. Proust frames the ability to properly perceive Berma's artistry, as well, as an ability that requires some experience. Berma and Venice are united in the narrator's fantasies:

> La Berma dans *Andromaque*, dans *Les Caprices de Marianne,* dans *Phèdre*, c'était de ces choses fameuses que mon imagination avait tant désirées. J'aurais le même ravissement que le jour où une gondole m'emmènerait au pied du Titien des Frari ou des Carpaccio de San Giorgio dei Schiavoni, si jamais j'entendais réciter par la Berma les vers : « On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous, Seigneur, etc. »[225]

But when he does finally see Berma in person, in *Phèdre,* he is disappointed:

> Je l'écoutais comme j'aurais lu *Phèdre*, ou comme si Phèdre elle-même avait dit en ce moment les choses que j'entendais, sans que le talent de la Berma semblât leur avoir rien ajouté.[226]

The disappointment he feels is precisely in not receiving what he perceives to be a vision of art filtered through Berma's genius. As in every area of life, but perhaps theater most explicitly so, the narrator seeks highly filtered encounter with art. The precise form of his disappointment with

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[224] Proust, *I*, 74.

[225] Proust, *I*, 432

[226] Proust, *I*, 440.

Berma is her lack of mediating presence. It is only over time (and additional fixation, which adds layers to his desire) that the narrator gradually comes to perceive the nuances of her performance, noting that he had come to her with too strong a desire in the first instance:

The narrator comes to have a greater understanding of Berma through the course of his artistic evolution. She serves as a test case for his ability to understand the nuances of gesture. The narrator's trips to the theater to see Berma train him for perceiving the performances and characters of everyday life. While she is a figure set apart by her artistry and celebrity, the space of the theater places the performances of everyday life in the spotlight, and offers a proving ground for the narrator's observational and descriptive abilities. The trip to the theater is a commonplace trope in 19th century literature, but what is compelling in the narrator's experience with Berma is that his first experience with her is one of disappointment rather than fulfillment. Through time and repeat engagement, his desire is fulfilled.

Berma's position also offers the opportunity to examine the narrator's evolving sexual positioning. Berma occupies an important space in the textual narrative because she is both female and a great artist. The narrator is able to exercise his fascination with women and with art through his preoccupation with Berma. Actresses throughout the text are tagged with the glimmer of sexual intrigue, lesbianism, and unattainability, and Berma's status as particularly noble artist further sets her apart. Like d'Annunzio, Proust fetishizes the position of actress, as so many beings inhabit her body. In a scene with particular resonance to Effrena's visions of Foscarina after a performance, the narrator is particularly titillated by the idea of Berma after a show. But what makes actresses so appealing is also what makes them so fragile—dependent on

their bodies for their livelihoods, their art is something framed in time and bound to fade.[227] The connection between bodily performance and sex is particularly resonant with Proust, as so many of his actress characters are also prostitutes. Sexuality and theater are connected in another way in Proust as well—both are able to incite extreme sensations. The transaction of a body providing extreme sensations for a price recurs in both Proust's presentation of sex and the theater.[228]

Phèdre

The link between sexuality and performance is heightened by Berma's specialization in Racine's Phèdre, which also trades on the extreme end of sexuality in order to generate narrative tension. Phèdre's incestuous desire for her stepson offers readers the frisson of incest—a taboo that generates revulsion or desire (or both). It is a taboo popular with Wagner, as well. By incorporating this dynamic, Racine ratchets up the narrative power of his verses.[229] It is useful to see how this dynamic plays itself out in Proust as well—in a novel concerned with aesthetic sensation, Proust's scenes of sado-masochism also serve to generate increased sensation for readers.

Finally, the presentation of Berma in the *Recherche* highlights both the power and the fallibility of the body. By the end of the novel, Berma is transformed from a sensation into a shell of herself. She is upstaged by Rachel, a younger actress, and is tormented by her fading power. After a rejection by her daughter in favor of Rachel, her younger competitor, Berma dies,

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[227] Other elements can fade, too—social connections with actresses can be detrimental to one's reputation.

[228] Morel also engages these dynamics.

[229] It is worth noting here that d'Annunzio also wrote a *Fedra*, in addition to a number of other sexually provocative plays.

forsaken by her body and her progeny.[230] Proust's presentation of Berma both valorizes and problematizes the idea of performance as art form. Though it is powerful in its ephemerality, performance is by definition marked out in time. Berma, though a transcendent practitioner of the sacred art of performance, is also proof positive of the need for inscription into a more permanent form. Her death is a reminder that performances cannot endure.

Teacup Wagner

Richard Wagner has one of the most auspicious debuts in all of the *Recherche.* He arrives in *Du Côté de chez Swann* in a swirl of synesthetic exuberance:

> le soleil, menacé par un nuage mais dardant encore de toute sa force sur la place et dans la sacristie, donnait une carnation de géranium aux tapis rouges qu'on y avait étendus par terre pour la solennité, et sur lesquels s'avançait en souriant Mme de Guermantes, et ajoutait à leur lainage un velouté rose, un épiderme de lumière, cette sorte de tendresse, de sérieuse douceur dans la pompe et dans la joie qui caractérisent certaines pages de *Lohengrin*, certaines peintures de Carpaccio, et qui font comprendre que Baudelaire ait pu appliquer au son de la trompette l'épithète de délicieux.[231]

Wagner is often more known for grandiosity and high drama than he is for subtle, nuanced depictions, and this point of entry into his work is particularly useful for Proust's appropriation of his work. First, this brief passage conflates light, religious ritual, flowers, regal home furnishings, emotion, a fetishized woman, ceremony, Wagner's work, the paintings of Carpaccio, and finally, Baudelaire, in a perfectly cross-sensory depiction of a delicious trumpet sound. It is a master course in total art in miniature, and it encapsulates the ways in which Proust will bring Wagner to life, even when he isn't writing explicitly of Wagner. Precisely what makes Proust

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[230] Proust, *IV*, 592.

[231] Proust, *I*, 178.

such an astute reader and adapter of Wagner is that he is attuned to the ways in which Wagner transgresses borders rather than establishing them.

Everyday Wagner

The pilgrimage to Bayreuth is the most imposing of Wagnerian practices, and Proust engages with the idea of Bayreuth throughout the narration. However, Proust is perhaps at his most insightful when he frames Wagner not within fantasies of the grandiose, but as a point of mundane reflection: a closing door echoes the *Tannhäuser Overture*, a telephone sounds like *Tristan*'s shepherd's pipe. These incursions reprogram the events of mundane life on a vast, orchestrated scale, cultivating an epic engagement with daily life. This is the path followed by the narrator, whose vocation as a writer gradually emerges from the accreted insights from his observation of small details. The equivocation of Wagner with small moments is instructive for the reader—small details, in profusion, build to epic over time. Wagner's small motifs do often gradually accumulate to become something great. The mythic scope of Wagner's own works obscures this process somewhat (not everyone can hear or see the correlation between medieval singing knights and household items). Proust perceives this dimension, however, and most importantly, activates it in the *Recherche,* placing a spotlight on the tiny details of life. Reading the thousands of pages of Proust, an act carved out in time, indoctrinates the reader in this process of synesthetic accretion. There may never have been such an efficient Wagner-booster in history. If Proust's telephone sounds like *Tristan*, the reader's telephone might well start to sound like it, too.

Because the scope of the *Recherche*, and Proust's expansive narrative style, offer ample

opportunities for transformation, his technique of Wagnerian musical references modulates across circumstances. One of the most evocative usages is the narrator's conversation with Saint-Loup during the war where they laugh about the Wagnerian air raid sirens amidst the war:

> Mais est-ce que tu n'aimes pas mieux le moment où, définitivement assimilés aux étoiles, ils s'en détachent pour partir en chasse ou rentrer après la berloque, le moment où ils « font apocalypse », même les étoiles ne gardant plus leur place. Et ces sirènes, était-ce assez wagnérien, ce qui, du reste, était bien naturel pour saluer l'arrivée des Allemands, ça faisait très hymne national, très Wacht am Rhein, avec le Kronprinz et les princesses dans la loge impériale ; c'était à se demander si c'était bien des aviateurs et pas plutôt des Walkyries qui montaient. » Il semblait avoir plaisir à cette assimilation des aviateurs et des Walkyries et l'expliquait, d'ailleurs, par des raisons purement musicales : « Dame, c'est que la musique des sirènes était d'une Chevauchée. Il faut décidément l'arrivée des Allemands pour qu'on puisse entendre du Wagner à Paris. » À certains points de vue la comparaison n'était pas fausse.[232]

Epic references can also supply the soundtrack to events of epic scale, as is the case in the war scene. Here, Wagnerian sensation echoes the fear (and surprising beauty) of war. Even in a time of turmoil, a reliance on art serves as a form of resistance for Proust. In inscribing a moment of aesthetic resonance into a moment of potential trauma, Proust makes it easier to process.[233]

Modernity

Proust's practices in these offhand musical correlations were a precursor to the ways in which Wagner is experienced today. In the era of customizable ringtones, Wagnerian motival exposure is a daily practice for anyone with a (ringing) cellular phone—that ringtone could even be a literal Wagnerian motif. The Wiener Staatsoper's Good Friday bells are a new option, but

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[232] Proust, *IV*, 337-338.

[233] Many critics have made the case that Wagner's theories of total art apply perfectly to film, which can fix the performances forever without risk of corruption or divergence in performance. However, film removes the possibility of live communion between artists and audiences.

the "Ride of the Valkyries" has been popular since the dawn of customizable ringtones. I will return to the discussion of motif in daily life in the final chapter. As regards Proust, in some ways this quotidian application of the motif would seem to run directly in opposition to Wagner's dramatic principles. However, in some ways, it sanctifies his works to be assimilated this way. Wagner's motifs are being used as devices to elevate life off the stage rather than only on it, imbuing the most mundane of events with force and emotional resonance. This is a form of appropriation that Wagner might not have conceived or approved of, but I believe it represents a productive evolution of his aims.

Silent Music

In *Proust as Musician*, Jean-Jacques Nattiez argues for Proust's use of music as a redemptive model for literature.[234] This is a common motif in the criticism around Proust's musical focal point in the *Recherche*, as Proust's meditations on the power of music are as compelling as perhaps anyone in the history of literature. Indeed, Proust takes both Wagner and d'Annunzio's examples seriously—music unquestionably occupies a vital space in the text. But here I would posit an opposing interpretation to that of Nattiez: Proust's narrator undergoes the trajectory of an artist's evolution in order to become a novelist. He fetishizes books, he shows the ways in which the physical object of the book impacts both the physical and the metaphysical self. Performance is powerful, the ability to ponder a piece of music in time is powerful. However, given the form of the novel, the transformations most pressing for Proust are the types of transformations that can come about via verbal meditation that endures. For this, the author

[234] Nattiez, *Proust as Musician*, 34.

needs a form in which he is able to comment, unfiltered by a mediating performer, on the transformation as it is in process. This form must be the novel.

M. Vinteuil

Proust, like d'Annunzio, stages fictional music at the heart of his multimedia narrative. I have discussed some of the ramifications of vaunting an imaginary musical composition in my analysis of *Il fuoco*, but Proust's use of the Vinteuil sonata in the *Recherche* differs significantly from d'Annunzio's use of Effrena's composition. First, as Effrena's work is both unwritten and unperformed, it exists only in his head, so all of the passages that incorporate it must also imply a first-person positioning. This perspective aligns easily with the free indirect discourse that d'Annunzio has used throughout the narrative (it generally only represents the positioning of Effrena or Foscarina). Because the representation is enclosed within the mind of the composer, d'Annunzio is able to be perfectly abstract in his descriptions. The music is innate to its host and doesn't need to communicate with anyone outside of him. In the *Recherche*, however, the trajectory is not so simple.

The reader encounters the *Recherche*'s resident composer, Vinteuil, in the first volume. His name is introduced very early in the text, in a comment from Swann. We learn nothing more about Vinteuil other than his association with the (real) actor Maubant, until the narrator's family pays a visit to his house:

> Vinteuil était venu avec sa fille se placer à côté de nous. D'une bonne famille, il avait été le professeur de piano des sœurs de ma grand'mère et quand, après la mort de sa femme et un héritage qu'il avait fait, il s'était retiré auprès de Combray, on le recevait souvent à la maison. Mais d'une pudibonderie excessive, il cessa de venir pour ne pas rencontrer

> Swann qui avait fait ce qu'il appelait « un mariage déplacé, dans le goût du jour » […] Quand on était venu lui annoncer mes parents, j'avais vu M. Vinteuil se hâter de mettre en évidence sur le piano un morceau de musique. Mais une fois mes parents entrés, il l'avait retiré et mis dans un coin. Sans doute avait-il craint de leur laisser supposer qu'il n'était heureux de les voir que pour leur jouer de ses compositions. Et chaque fois que ma mère était revenue à la charge au cours de la visite, il avait répété plusieurs fois : « Mais je ne sais qui a mis cela sur le piano, ce n'est pas sa place », et avait détourné la conversation sur d'autres sujets, justement parce que ceux-là l'intéressaient moins. Sa seule passion était pour sa fille, et celle-ci, qui avait l'air d'un garçon, paraissait si robuste qu'on ne pouvait s'empêcher de sourire en voyant les précautions que son père prenait pour elle, ayant toujours des châles supplémentaires à lui jeter sur les épaules.[235]

The passage that introduces M. Vinteuil to the reader is followed swiftly thereafter by a discussion of Vinteuil's daughter, Mlle. Vinteuil and her female "amie," her lover. Proust does not give either of the women have first names in the narrative, and the friend has no last name either. Both of the women live with M. Vinteuil, and the notorious friend is described as "une amie plus âgée, qui avait mauvaise réputation dans le pays et qui un jour s'installa définitivement à Montjouvain." [236] The second time that Vinteuil appears, it is by proxy, through his daughter and her lover, in a sexually charged scene at their home in Montjouvain, in which the women seem to have constructed an erotic ritual around the desecration of his picture.[237] Vinteuil is initially framed by his sense of unimpeachable propriety and love for his daughter, both of which are problematized by her comportment. He avoids acknowledging his daughter's lesbian life, but the narrator describes his body as bowing under the weight of her actions. This inauspicious beginning is M. Vinteuil's introductory narrative iteration.

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[235] Proust, *I*, 111.

[236] Proust, *I*, 145.

[237] Proust, *I*, 162.

Erasing Vinteuil

The Vinteuil sonata has often been referenced as a Wagnerian leitmotif, and its role in the text is quite extraordinary. Unlike Venice and Berma, both of which are iconicized by name before the narrator ever encounters them in person, the composer Vinteuil is present in the narrator's offhand reminiscences of Combray, and his depiction (other than the reference to his performative behavior with the sheet music) is biographical. It is not until a volume later, in the novelistic incursion of *Un Amour de Swann* that his music is heard for the first time, and even the narrator hesitates to unite the artist Vinteuil and biographical Vinteuil. In this hesitance we might find the trace of Wagner's fears—that even should his work enjoy eventual success and prominence, it is completely disembodied from his own life.

The Vinteuil sonata is, famously, silent. Though Proust made reference to its inspiration, both in letters and in early drafts of the novel, over the course of many versions, he erased the signposts that linked it to real-world compositions. Reams of critical ink have been spent scouring its potential sources. Nattiez calls this "the favorite theme of studies devoted to the presence of music in Proust, and the one that most fascinates the general public […] the search for sources of "the little phrase."[238] Within the world of the text, however, it would seem that its silence is precisely the point.

Proust generally signals references to the music of the sonata by referencing a single musical motif within it, the most oft-cited corollary of Wagner and literature, "la petite phrase," the small linguistic phrase that applies a phrase of Vinteuil's music. This is a particularly useful resource for music/literature fans, as "phrase" is the smallest semiotic unit for which the total

[238] Nattiez, *Proust as Musician*, 3.

conflation of words and music is possible. (It's also helpful that it is the same in both French and English.)

It is crucial to emphasize, in framing the encounter with this phrase, that its first iteration occurs during the single section of the text for which the narrator is not the narrator. Because the events of *Un Amour de Swann* take place before the narrator's birth, *Un Amour de Swann*'s text unfolds in third person narration very similar to that of *Il fuoco,* with regular incursions of free indirect discourse.

The "petite phrase" is often referred to in criticism as a a definitive verbal leitmotif, not just for Proust, but for literature as a whole. It recurs numerous times, always in evolving circumstances, providing first Swann, and later, the narrator, with emotional benchmarks whenever it crosses their minds. It both unifies feeling over time and marks the shift in time. However, it is a particular quirk that the motif appears for its first iteration in a position in which the narrator is not present. It is Odette, the emotional corollary of the motif for Swann, who finally transmits it to the narrator on the piano. The value of a musical motif in Wagner's usage is that the listener perceives its evolution over time. In the case of the Vinteuil motif, the narrator cannot hear the first iteration because he has not yet been born. Yet the rest of the text operates as if he had heard it. This is perhaps the most striking feat of all, as it establishes in precise terms the strangeness of the interpolated third-person novella of *Un Amour de Swann*. The novel's presence highlights the desire of the narrator to frame himself not only through the perception of others, but through the optics of a work of art—a novel. The potency of desire and projection inherent in effecting this transfer is especially moving—the leitmotif has a specific meaning for Swann in particular:

> Mais peu lui importait, il la considérait moins en elle-même — en ce qu'elle pouvait exprimer pour un musicien qui ignorait l'existence et de lui et d'Odette quand il l'avait composée, et pour tous ceux qui l'entendraient dans des siècles — que comme un gage, un souvenir de son amour qui, même pour les Verdurin ou pour le petit pianiste, faisait penser à Odette en même temps qu'à lui, les unissait ; c'était au point que, comme Odette, par caprice, l'en avait prié, il avait renoncé à son projet de se faire jouer par un artiste la sonate entière, dont il continua à ne connaître que ce passage. « Qu'avez-vous besoin du reste ? lui avait-elle dit. C'est ça notre morceau. »[239]

And though the narrator has no access to this sound or this experience, later in the narrative, he fuses with it. The "petite phrase" acquires a parallel meaning for the narrator.

The modeling of this transfer of motivic meaning (from a character in a novel to oneself), in tandem with the silence of the phrase, seems to suggest that this transference could occur for the reader as well. For the reader of Proust, "la petite phrase" has no sonic existence beyond the language that suggests it. But if the narrator can access its embedded meaning in absentia, perhaps the reader can, too. Indeed, the phrase becomes one of the definitive motifs that orient the narrator's life in time and sensation, and the narrator's articulation of these running themes spurs his final awakening to his vocation as a writer.[240] But we have one more corollary in our search for sound in the Vinteuil sonata:

> Au moment où je pensais cela, une mesure de la sonate me frappa, mesure que je connaissais bien pourtant, mais parfois l'attention éclaire différemment des choses connues pourtant depuis longtemps et où nous remarquons ce que nous n'avions jamais vu. En jouant cette mesure, et bien que Vinteuil fût là en train d'exprimer un rêve qui fût resté tout à fait étranger à Wagner, je ne pus m'empêcher de murmurer : « Tristan », avec le sourire qu'a l'ami d'une famille retrouvant quelque chose de l'aïeul dans une intonation, un geste du petit-fils qui ne l'a pas connu. Et comme on regarde alors une photographie qui permet de préciser la ressemblance, par-dessus la sonate de Vinteuil,

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[239] Proust, *I*, 215.

[240] Though this response is likely an outlier, the presence of the phrase is also enough to spur some people's desire to become composers. James Holden writes about this experience in *In Search of Vinteuil: Music, Literature, and a Self Regained.*

> j'installai sur le pupitre la partition de Tristan, dont on donnait justement cet après-midi-là des fragments au concert Lamoureux. Je n'avais, à admirer le maître de Bayreuth, aucun des scrupules de ceux à qui, comme à Nietzsche, le devoir dicte de fuir, dans l'art comme dans la vie, la beauté qui les tente, et qui s'arrachent à Tristan comme ils renient Parsifal et, par ascétisme spirituel, de mortification en mortification parviennent, en suivant le plus sanglant des chemins de croix, à s'élever jusqu'à la pure connaissance et à l'adoration parfaite du Postillon de Longjumeau. Je me rendais compte de tout ce qu'a de réel l'œuvre de Wagner, en revoyant ces thèmes insistants et fugaces qui visitent un acte, ne s'éloignent que pour revenir, et, parfois lointains, assoupis, presque détachés, sont, à d'autres moments, tout en restant vagues, si pressants et si proches, si internes, si organiques, si viscéraux qu'on dirait la reprise moins moins d'un motif que d'une névralgie.[241]

An average reader might not immediately attempt to compose a phrase to match that of Vinteuil. However, verbal references to music are often enough to spark involuntary musical memory, which may turn into repetitive or perseverative music. Oliver Sacks wrote about this phenomenon for *Brain* in 2006: "involuntary musical imagery […] may be evoked by a sight, a sound, a word, with some significant, though often unconscious, association […] this may then turn into a earworm)."[242] Being subconscious, this is an unpredictable process—not everyone thinks of sound in the same way, and as in the case of *Il fuoco*, the more training a reader has, the likelier she is to confront a reference like Proust's as inherently multimedia. However, scientific commentary on the function of music (and verbal references to music) in evoking memory is particularly strong; In *Musicophilia,* Sacks emphasizes music's particular ability to restore

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[241] Proust, *III*, 750.

[242] Sacks, "The Power of Music." Sacks is useful for contemplating Proust and music in general, and I find he exceeds the utility of popular authors on the topic, such as Jonah Lehrer's *Proust was a neuroscientist.* There is a particularly excellent episode of Nova's *Musical Minds* in which Sacks undergoes brain imaging while listening to different composers, about whom he has distinct feelings. Though not explicitly tied to the research in this project, it is fascinating to see that the brain echoes the force of emotion that individuals attach to music. (Sacks, *Musical Minds.*)

memory in patients with brain injuries or dementia.[243] Proust, though he was not a neuroscientist, nonetheless seems to intuit much of music's function in the brain.

With this, we return to Wagner. Proust mentions *Tristan* in conjunction with the Vinteuil sonata. This isn't to suggest that *Tristan* is the Vinteuil sonata, but by introducing the opera into the narrative in concert Vinteuil's sonata, which is music without a real-world referent, Proust subtly conflates the two. In practical terms, it is likely that a reader who knows *Tristan* is involuntarily hearing some part of it as they read about the Vinteuil sonata. This is an amazing feat of narrative sleight-of-hand. Proust is not the first person to put this practice into use in the novel, but he is one of the most successful.

The deployment of the "petite phrase" is particularly striking as a literary device. Vinteuil's music is described through a meditation on its function by a non-specialist; his words render in fine detail the experience of listening to something one loves. Proust uses the medium of the text to invite the reader to participating in the creation of this imaginary masterpiece through their prior experiences, musical or thematic. The "petite phrase" becomes, then, a follow-your-own sensation experience. The reader's encounter with the unit is sparked by what they have experienced to that time. It is an aesthetic experience tuned to the musical motifs of the reader's own life, whether they resemble *Tristan* or something else altogether. The musical motif of the reader's life may thus fuse with the narrative.

The final dimension of the Vinteuil sonata that holds resonance with this Wagnerian project is the fact that all of Vinteuil's success is posthumous. The septet exists as a performance entity because it has been transcribed by the lover of Vinteuil's daughter. Thus the woman

[243] Sacks, *Musicophilia,* 208-209.

accused of tarnishing Vinteuil's reputation, of ruining his legacy, is in fact the reason his most precious artistic contribution endures. Proust is particularly skilled with conflating performance and the written record, and this section is no exception. Vinteuil's daughter's friend of ill repute transcribes the septet for performance, making the performance of it, and thus the narrator's flood of memory, possible.

Performance and revelation

D'Annunzio's metamorphosed crowds in the novel were just a placeholder for the actual crowds he hoped to attract to his real-world theater. With his belief in a transformative theatrical event driven by a preternaturally talented hero, d'Annunzio cast his protagonist Effrena as animatore. The public was intended to receive his revelation, not co-create it. The *Recherche* presents a different relationship between artist and audience, one that is predicated not on the material form of the theater, but the material form of the book.

Book form is the ending point of meditation upon which the *Recherche* hinges. The final, moving passage of the novel problematizes the physical acquisition of sensory experience and its effect on the body.

> La date à laquelle j'entendais le bruit de la sonnette du jardin de Combray, si distant et pourtant intérieur, était un point de repère dans cette dimension énorme que je ne savais pas avoir. J'avais le vertige de voir au-dessous de moi et en moi pourtant, comme si j'avais des lieues de hauteur, tant d'années.
>
> Je venais de comprendre pourquoi le duc de Guermantes, dont j'avais admiré, en le regardant assis sur une chaise, combien il avait peu vieilli bien qu'il eût tellement plus d'années que moi au-dessous de lui, dès qu'il s'était levé et avait voulu se tenir debout, avait vacillé sur des jambes flageolantes comme celles de ces vieux archevêques sur lesquels il n'y a de solide que leur croix métallique et vers lesquels s'empressent les jeunes séminaristes, et ne s'était avancé qu'en tremblant comme une feuille sur le

> sommet peu praticable de quatre-vingt-trois années, comme si les hommes étaient juchés sur de vivantes échasses grandissant sans cesse, parfois plus hautes que des clochers, finissant par leur rendre la marche difficile et périlleuse, et d'où tout d'un coup ils tombent. Je m'effrayais que les miennes fussent déjà si hautes sous mes pas, il ne me semblait pas que j'aurais encore la force de maintenir longtemps attaché à moi ce passé qui descendait déjà si loin, et que je portais si douloureusement en moi ! Si du moins il m'était laissé assez de temps pour accomplir mon œuvre, je ne manquerais pas de la marquer au sceau de ce Temps dont l'idée s'imposait à moi avec tant de force aujourd'hui, et j'y décrirais les hommes, cela dût-il les faire ressembler à des êtres monstrueux, comme occupant dans le Temps une place autrement considérable que celle si restreinte qui leur est réservée dans l'espace, une place, au contraire, prolongée sans mesure, puisqu'ils touchent simultanément, comme des géants, plongés dans les années, à des époques vécues par eux, si distantes — entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus se placer — dans le Temps.[244]

It is a sound memory, a simple sound, but one that helps set the narrator's path of revelation in motion. Like the opening drone of *Rheingold,* which re-appears in *Götterdämmerung* as Valhalla burns, Proust's narrative closes where it began, creating a perfect circle.

There is no shortage of punch lines attached to the extreme length of the *Recherche*, and the novel obviously has much to offer the reader beyond an activity that will keep them busy for some time. But the length of the text does serve a purpose in terms of reader engagement. It cultivates interest, it cultivates dedication, and it marks the reader's place in time with respect to the narrative. A reader's life can easily change in the amount of time it takes to read the *Recherche.* The first time I read the whole set sequentially, my grandfather died just as I reached the end of *Le Temps Retrouvé.* Every moment of his funeral was colored by what I had just read. There, I saw my distant uncles—whom I remembered from my childhood as wild, funloving, perpetually drunk lunatics—wearing posh suits, their hairlines receded, their jobs corporate, their attention turned obsessively toward keeping their teenage daughters away from young people

[244] Proust, *IV*, 625.

like they had been. Instead of recoiling in shock, it made me laugh. The funeral was less painful because it was so easy to process it as a narrative, I had just read how it could be done.

The continuing popularity of nonfiction works that chronicle the experience of reading the *Recherche* as marked in time suggests that I am not the only reader who, like the narrator of the *Recherche* himself, enjoys framing my life within the novels of others.[245] By problematizing the process of self-writing alongside the acquisition of sensory detail, the *Recherche*'s greatest achievement is in actualizing the Wagnerian experience, but not from the position of audience member. Proust's rich tapestry of references and carefully inserted points of silence allow the reader to try her hand at serving as author and composer of her own *Gesamtkunstleben.* In an interview printed in *Lire et relire Proust*, the filmmaker Chantal Akerman notes that "les cinéastes ne voulait que racconter l'histoire, Ils veulent tout—comment dire—écraser. Au contraire, il faut tout étendre, il faut que cela respire." [246] Akerman, who adapted Proust's *La prisonnière* into the remarkable 2000 film *La captive*, expresses a philosophy of adapting Proust that aligns precisely with Proust's own method of writing, and with Proust's method of adapting Wagner.

[245] See: De Botton, *How Proust can change your life: not a novel*; M. Rose, *The Year of Reading Proust: A Memoir in Real Time.*

[246] Compagnon, *Lire et relire Proust*, 73.

Chapter Four
Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus:* Transformation and its discontents

> The artist always carries a work of art as a whole within himself. Although aesthetics may insist that literary and musical works, in contradistinction to the plastic arts, are dependent on time and succession of events, it is nevertheless true that even such works strive at every moment to be present as a whole.
>
> -Thomas Mann,
> *The Story of a Novel; The genesis of Doctor Faustus*[247]

In the preceding chapters, I have charted the ways in which d'Annunzio and Proust transpose Wagner's conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* into novel form. From *Il fuoco*'s vibrant but incomplete prose triptych to the multigenerational ouroboros of Proust's *Recherche*, a characteristic set of stylistic devices for concept of the Wagnerian novel emerges. Most prominent among these: an artist hero; a conspicuous manipulation of the presentation of the authorial self within the narrative; encyclopedic references to existing works of art, music, myth, literature, and history; a preoccupation with the female body as a site of creativity or reproduction; and the inclusion of fictional music that plays a pivotal role in the action of the plot, despite its semantic silence. This is a surprisingly large set of shared attributes, and each author manipulates these factors in distinct ways. D'Annunzio's process is most akin to the assembly of a mosaic—the majority of his individual references have clearly defined borders. Like the *mostro* created by the jeweled women in Effrena's speech narrative, the combined effect of d'Annunzio's references in *Il fuoco* is greater than the sum of their parts. However, when viewed in detail, they are references and symbols that can be isolated one by one. D'Annunzio's techniques, though multimedia, have a flatness to them—as both the narrative itself and the

[247] Mann, Doctor Faustus: *The Story of a Novel; The genesis of Doctor Faustus*, 220.

author's work thereafter attests, actual theater (and eventually, politics) were his eventual destinations. The novel *Il fuoco* operates as an ideological sketch for future endeavors in another medium rather than as a fully realized work in itself.

Proust's practice is closest to Wagner's across the board—the theatrical sights and sounds staged in the text synthesize to form a unified whole. However, one can distinguish their individual borders if one turns her attention to any particular dynamic: literature, music, art, history, architecture. Proust's motifs modulate, transform, and intertwine, but as on the printed score, one can identify their individual lines.

Thomas Mann's encyclopedic narrative *Doctor Faustus*: *The life of the German composer Adrian Leverkühn*, uses the same set of Wagnerian techniques that *Il fuoco* and the *Recherche* use, but with a complicating factor. Many of the references used by Mann are themselves works that have been adapted across multiple iterations, already spanning a variety of media. To take the most obvious example, the titular reference to "Doctor Faustus" conjures up artworks from 1587 through today, in the realms of historical record, biographical sketch, theatrical play, closet drama, opera, painting, symphony, pop song, and ballet. Lang notes that even the *Faustbuch* itself problematized montage, providing not only a framework of action, essential thematic material, and important stylistic elements for Mann's montage technique, but that it also influenced Mann's montage technique itself in *Doctor Faustus.* Mann came to view montage as an integral part of the Faust theme.[248] Beyond the *Faustbuch*, however, an abridged list of artists adapting the dimensions of the protagonist Faust includes: Christopher Marlowe,

[248] Allen, *The Faust Legend: Popular Formula and Modern Novel*, 67.

Franz Liszt, Charles Gounod, J. W. von Goethe, Hector Berlioz, Gustav Mahler, Lord Byron, George Sand, Modest Mussorgsky, Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner.

Mann conscientiously adapted his work across all of these references. He knew the depths of their content, and he uses them all indiscriminately in the text, without any system to indicate which version of "Faust," pre-existing or invented by him, he is conjuring at any given time. More importantly, the characters in *Doctor Faustus* also proclaim their awareness of all of these references. When the details of their lives overlap with cultural touchpoints, the Faust legend, for example it is unclear whether the actions of the characters in the text simply happen to align with the Faust legend, or whether the characters are acting to stage their lives as Faust narrative. This is a question that can never be answered, and it looms over the narrative.

Beyond this dynamic, however, hovers an additional complicating factor. Mann himself performs the making of this text, by publishing his work of autobiographical literary criticism *The Genesis of Doctor Faustus: The novel of a novel (Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus: Roman eines Romans)*.[249] As Sean Ireton suggests in his study on autobiography in Mann, even the titles of the two works conflate their depictions of reality and narrative framing: while the account of the making of the text is framed as a "novel," the "novel" *Doctor Faustus* is titled as life writing.[250] *Genesis* is an extraordinary document. When it was produced, Mann was writing

[249] Indeed, the text is reminiscent of nothing so much as the final chapter of Dante's *Vita Nova*, which offers chronological autobiographical content (of dubious "truth"), literary self-criticism, and a preview of the author's projected triumph in the *Divina Commedia.* It is diary, criticism, and publicity stunt all in one: Appresso questo sonetto apparve a me una mirabile / visione, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non / dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più / degnamente trattare di lei. / E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, sì com'ella sae / veracemente. Sì che, se piacere sarà di colui a cui tutte le cose / vivono, che la mia vita duri per alquanti anni, io spero di dicer / di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna. (Alighieri, *Vita Nova,* 43.1-43.2.)

[250] Ireton, "Between Autobiography and Fiction: Thomas Mann's *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus: Roman eines Romans*," 211.

at the end of an incredibly productive career. Like Wagner, he had published extensively in a variety of genres; in addition to his incredible output of fiction, he was a coveted speaker and published his speeches and freestanding essays.[251] He had never published a companion guide to a novel before. This text, structured in days like a diary, poses as autobiography. However, its opening citation from Goethe's *Dichtung und Warheit* immediately undermines any claims as to authoritative "truth". This doubled presentation of the authorial self is one of the elements that brings *Doctor Faustus* most intimately into conversation with Wagner's legacy.

In *Genesis,* Mann describes his literary technique in the novel as "montage", and though critics have leapt on this word as a way to make sense of the maniacally overlapping webs of reference and association in the novel, I don't find his description especially accurate. Montage implies a continuous intersplicing of images, sounds, and symbols, but in film, it is typically possible to distinguish the borders of each component piece. *Doctor Faustus.* The system of multilayered symbols and referents in *Doctor Faustus* completely obliterates all borders.

To take an example from stagecraft, the construction of *Doctor Faustus* seems to me most akin to the focus process of stage lighting.[252] On a standard theatrical light, there are insertion slots for diverse filter panels, each of which can add transparent color (gels), shadow patterns (gobos), and sharp borders (cuts) to the lights. A lighting "look" includes many dozens (even hundreds) of lights. When projected onstage together, the overlap of the filters on each light is such that it is generally impossible to tell while looking at a light onstage whether its components include, for instance, two lights with a red and a yellow gel or just one orange light.

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[251] Mann authorized the publication of his diaries thirty years after his death.

Individual lights can be dimmed or strengthened, and most moments of theatrical lighting design use a wide variety of strengths, colors, and filters. Viewed together, they appear as a seamless whole, but each contributing light can be manipulated in virtually infinite ways to adjust the look for each scenic cue. It is extremely difficult to distinguish among them.[253] Mann's system of references in *Doctor Faustus* works precisely like this. A reader is never sure exactly what she is looking at—is it a flat reference to Goethe's *Faust*? A reference to both Goethe and Gounod? A reference only to Berlioz?

As with *Il fuoco* and the *Recherche*, a reader's familiarity with the works Mann invokes is the most powerful optic to bring the narrative into focus. However, with Mann, even an incredibly broad knowledge of cultural reference points does not necessarily improve the overall clarity of the novel. Much of the criticism around this text suffers from the same fatal error: in a text with virtually unlimited systems of symbols, it is extremely tempting to create one fixed point by which to interpret the innumerable variables. Gunilla Bergsten takes this one step further in her approach, positing a web of fixed motifs that function as an echo the 12-tone composition practiced by the protagonist. Whether one picks a single fixed point or many, symbols in *Doctor Faustus* remain elusive.

Ignorance of the depth of Mann's field of references can offer the possibility for satisfyingly concrete proclamations. A number of critics assert that Mann, in setting Leverkühn's first major composition as an adaptation from William Shakespeare's *Love's Labors Lost,* chose a

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[253] For a brief glimpse of this hypnotic practice in action, see: The Seattle Repertory's "*The Cure at Troy* Lighting Focus Time Lapse," which compresses 13 hours of lighting design into just under ninety seconds: www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWZ9vIya3xA.

For a slightly longer exploration of light in operatic storytelling, see: The Royal Opera's "Discover Opera: Lighting Design *Madame Butterfly*": www.youtube.com/watch?v=59AmLpqV24s.

subject as "anti-Wagnerian" as possible. A statement like that is only possible if one does not know that Wagner's second completed opera, *Das Liebesverbot*, was also based on a Shakespearean comedy: *Measure for Measure*. Critical orientation, particularly with a text like this, works like a faceted crystal in the light; it breaks the single beam of the text into its composite colors. Following my own preferred color, I'll observe here that Mann's success in blending these dynamics so thoroughly is perhaps his greatest Wagnerian triumph.

Wagner, Mann, Autobiography

Thomas Mann's fixation with Richard Wagner has been explored in exhaustive detail since the dawn of his career, not only by critics, but by Mann himself. Mann spoke and wrote at length on both his debts and resistance to Wagner—two critical works in particular, "Wagner and our time" and "The Sorrows and Grandeurs of Richard Wagner" articulate these dynamics in vibrant detail. Mann's fiction is also a testament to his fixation: two of Mann's short stories, "Tristan" and "Blood of the Wälsungs," broadcast their ties to Wagner's characters in their very titles, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* is a plot device in *Magic Mountain,* and many critics have heard echoes of Wagner in *Death in Venice*. But attention to the presence of Wagner in *Doctor Faustus: The life of the German composer Adrian Leverkühn* (1947) has been less robust. As the novel chronicles the life of a German composer whose explicit goal is to revolutionize music, a connection to Wagner might seem imminently plausible. However, the titular composer's more explicit resemblance to two other public figures has tended to pull greater critical focus. Leverkühn's biographical trajectory mirrors that of Friedrich Nietzsche. A young man of obvious brilliance enjoys a trajectory of increasingly widespread acclaim against the backdrop of

increasingly unstable health; after a public breakdown, he spends the remaining years of his life in the care of family members. As in the case of Nietzsche, syphilis is strongly implied as the cause of Leverkühn's disease. However, while biographical details link Leverkühn to the music enthusiast, philosopher, and erstwhile friend of Wagner himself, Leverkühn's twelve-tone compositional techniques, elaborated upon in precise detail by himself and his biographer, are imported directly from the work of the 20th-century composer Arnold Schoenberg. Leverkühn's musical experimentation takes place against the rise of Hitler and National Socialism.

Though his gestures toward political detail are somewhat oblique, Mann incorporates a barrage of cultural touch points, both fictional and historical, into the narrative of *Doctor Faustus.* Mann stages the text as a biographical record, but not autobiography. The novel unfolds as first-person narration by Serenus Zeitblom, a philologist and childhood friend of the protagonist. The first three chapters of the book (it contains forty-seven chapters and an epilogue) focus on Zeitblom's biography, entwining the recording of knowledge with the biographical details of the hand that records. While legitimizing his own unique preparation for the task of transcribing Leverkühn's life into print (privileged childhood exposure, scholarly training, a history of artistic collaboration), Zeitblom places emphasis on the role of words and documentation. The project also has at its heart the idea of the transubstantiation of spirit into document: Zeitblom meditates at length on the obligations of the individual effecting this transformation (i.e., him). These dimensions are not only at play in his role as biographer, but in his professional and personal relationship with Leverkühn:

> It was my lot in life to spend many years in intimate proximity with a man of genius, the hero of these pages, to know him from childhood on, to witness his growth, and his fate,

> and to play a modest supporting role in his work. The libretto adapted from Shakespeare's comedy *Love's Labour's Lost,* Leverkühn's mischievous youthful composition, comes from me; I was also permitted some influence on the preparation of the texts for both the grotesque opera suite *Gesta Romanorum* and the oratorio *The Revelation of St. John the Divine.* That is one factor, or perhaps several. I am moreover, in possession of papers, of priceless manuscripts, which the deceased bequeathed to me, and to no one else, in a will written during a period of health, or, if I may not put it that way, during a period of comparative and legal sanity, papers I shall use to document my presentation—indeed, I plan to select certain of them for direct inclusion in it.[254]

In a text with considerable ties to Wagner, who vigorously championed his commitment to libretti of style and substance, Zeitblom's service as Leverkühn's librettist in addition to artistic executor carries particular weight.[255] Zeitblom is equally entrusted with the words that help generate Leverkühn's art and the chronicle of Leverkühn's life. This conflation of art, life, and material document is not the primary thrust of the narrative, but it is the central concern of the narration, and by establishing a philologist as narrator, Mann underscores the presence of material continuity even amidst artistic (and political) revolution.

> I am a thoroughly even-tempered man, indeed, if I may say so, a healthy, humanely tempered man with a mind given to things harmonious and reasonable, a scholar and *conjuratus* of the "Latin host," not without ties to the fine arts (I play the viola d'amore), but a son of the muses in the academic sense of the term, who gladly regards himself a descendant of the German humanists associated with *Letters of the Obscure Men*, and heir to Reuchlin, Crotus of Dornheim, Mutianus, and Eoban Hesse. [256]

Interestingly, though his protagonist's musical ambitions include finding a way to break from past forms, the text repeatedly inscribes its place in a variety of artistic, musical, theoretical,

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[254] Mann, *Doctor Faustus,* 7-8.

[255] Leverkühn resembles many individuals in addition to Nietzsche and Schoenberg, so the search for biographical ties to other individuals, both real and fictitious, is more illuminating in terms of evaluating Mann's process for staging a hero than it is for finding a single point of origin for the character. It is nonetheless worth noting that many of the protagonist's fictional compositions align in many degrees with the compositions of Richard Wagner. In addition to his youthful *Das Liebesverbot,* Wagner also worked on the Faust legend at various times throughout his life, and wrote a "miracle play," *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel,* a religious-themed oration.

[256] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 6.

historical, and political lineages. As narrator, Zeitblom purports to establish a documentary verification process for the details he shares, building trust with the reader. However, though the narrative is organized and set forth by a fixed voice, that voice itself is defined by its constant vacillation between ideas and its continual retreads of previous concepts:

> With utmost emphasis I wish to assert that it is not out of any desire to thrust my own person into the foreground that I offer a few words about myself and my circumstances in preface to this account of the life of the late Adrian Leverkühn, to this first and certainly very provisional biography of a musical genius, a revered man man sorely tried by fate, which both raised him up and cast him down. I offer such words solely under the presumption that the reader--or better, future reader, since at the moment there is still not the slightest prospect that my manuscript will ever see the light of public day, unless, that is, by some miracle it were to leave our beleaguered Fortress Europe and share the whispered secrets of our isolation with those outside--but, please, allow me to begin anew: Only because I assume that someone might wish in passing to be informed as to who and what the reader is, do I preface these disclosures with a few remarks concerning my person, though not without real apprehension that in so doing I may move the reader to doubt whether he finds himself in the right hands, which is to say: whether, given all that I am, I am the right man for a task to which I am drawn more by my hear, perhaps, than any legitimizing affinity.
>
> Reading back over these preceding lines, I cannot help noticing a certain uneasiness, a labored breathing, only too characteristic of the state of mind in which I find myself here today (in Freising on the Isar, on 23 May 1943, two years after Leverkühn's death, which is to say, two years since he passed from the depth of night into deepest night), as I sit down in my little study of so many years to commence my description of the life of my unfortunate friend, resting now (oh may it be so!) with God--characteristic, I say, of a state of mind that is the most onerous combination of a heart-pounding need to speak and a deep reticence before my own inadequacy. (DF 5-6)

Zeitblom's narration colors the transmission of all the details he provides, staging his performance of biographical development in the face of a projected public he characterizes in turn as passionate, disinterested, hostile, generous, or nonexistent. Because the foundation of information provided by Zeitblom is somewhat erratic and unfocused, it encourages the reader to cling to any fixed points of reference to anchor her reading. In contrast to d'Annunzio and

Proust, who stage their narrative with frequent concrete visual referents; musical, literary, and historical references dominate the narrative space of *Doctor Faustus*—the text forms an image composed of other stories and sounds.

Novel music

As music, Wagner's music in particular, is a site of persistent fixation for Mann, a wide range of studies explore the author's appropriation of musical terms, movements, and celebrities in his novels. Marilyn Gaddis Rose is especially precise in her structural commentary on the musical composition of *Doktor Faustus:*

> We may not notice quite so readily that the structure is similar to that of a formal musical composition. The encounter with the devil divides the book in half. In addition, the novel builds to a full development of its happier aspects through Chapter XXXIV with a falling off in fortune therafter. However, within or upon the halves and the elongated crescendo just mentioned, the novel also has three contrapuntal movements, a kind of ABA form, if we will allow continual thematic recapitulation instead of contrast. Like a sonata, it has two subjects. Within and between chapters the subjects come in sequentially. Like a symphony, the novel has an epilogue which brings the two subjects together.[257]

R. B. Farrell, in contrast, takes a aggressively thematic stance on this issue of music in the text, suggesting the theme of this extraordinary work is the sterility of music and art in general in our times.[258] The range of critical perspectives that unite music and Mann is a testament to the author's broad musical grounding. But one dimension that is rarely explored in these characterizations of Mann's "prose music" is the disjunction in the reception of music versus the reception of prose. Whereas an enthusiast of a work of long prose might read it in full a handful

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[257] Rose, "More on the Musical Composition of *Doktor Faustus,*" 83.

[258] Farrell, "Thomas Mann and the Crisis of Modern Art," 5.

of times during a lifetime, works of music, even in the eras in which recorded music was less readily available, tend to be encountered many dozens of times in a lifetime: encounters with music are frequently defined by repeat engagement. Mann manipulates the dynamics of repeat exposure of theme and variations to evoke the dynamics that link text and music.

One of the elements that brings *Doctor Faustus* closest to the experience of music is thus something that distinguishes it from most musical works: its narration. Because his style is rambling and circular, Zeitblom's obsessively self-interrogating prose is particularly suited to the needs of a text that problematizes music's vaunted non-representation. Though plenty of words are present in the novel, they are often strangely devoid of representational details, and Zeitblom's descriptions often cloud, rather than clarify, the details at hand. Though Zeitblom presents himself in the first lines of the novel, Mann withholds Zeitblom's name until the beginning of the second chapter, blurring the lines between author, narrator, and subject. As in the case of Proust, the withholding of the narrator's name encourages the reader to conflate narrator and author, even if unconsciously. Zeitblom's circular approach also resembles music in its repetitive nature and its frequent flights away from representational depiction. As the primary witness to the hero's life persistently encourages doubt on all aspects of his testimony, the subjects Zeitblom covers, even those accompanied by documentary evidence, are blurred and partially erased.

Schoenberg and Leverkühn

As the life story of a composer, the representation of the relationship between music and text is of central importance for *Doctor Faustus* as a whole. The narrative continually asserts,

modulates, and reiterates the shared dimensions of music and words as Leverkühn, determined to challenge the limits of musical expression, commits himself to a new mode of harmonic development:

> "It all comes from one basic figure, from a row of intervals capable of multiple variation, taken from the five notes B-D-A-D-E-flat—both the horizontal and vertical lines are determined and governed by it, to the extent that it is possible in a basic motif with such a limited number of notes. It is like a word, a key word that leaves its signature everywhere in the song and would like to determine it entirely. It is, however, too short a word, with too little flexibility. The tonal space it provides is too limited. One would have to proceed from here and build longer words from the twelve steps of the tempered semi-tone alphabet, words of twelve letters, specific combinations and interrelations of the twelve semitones, rows of notes—from which, then, the piece, a given movement, or a whole work of several movements would be strictly derived. Each tone in the entire composition, melodic and harmonic, would have to demonstrate its relation to this predetermined basic row. None would dare recur until all have first occurred. No note would dare appear that did not fulfill its motif function within the structure as a whole. Free notes would no longer exist. That is what I would call a strict style. [...]
>
> It can't be done all that simply, either. One would have to build into the system all known techniques of variation even those decried as artificial—the same method, that is, that once helped development gain control over the sonata. I asked myself why I practiced those old contrapuntal devices for so long under Kretzschmar, filling all that music paper with inverted fugues, crab canons, and inverted crab canons. Well, you see, it can all now be put to use for ingenious modification of the twelve-tone word." [259]

This method Leverkühn describes here is an accurate rendition of the work of composer Arnold Schoenberg. Schoenberg was not pleased with the inclusion, "Adrian Leverkühn does not know the essentials of composing with twelve notes. All he knows has been told him by Mr. Adorno, who knows only the little I was able to tell my pupils."[260] After the first edition of *Doctor Faustus* was published in 1947, a lukewarm disclaimer was included at the back of the text to alert readers to the ownership of this idea and of Mann's debt to the composer. Schoenberg's

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[259] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 205-206.

[260] Schoenberg, "The Blessing of the Dressing," *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg,* 386.

theory of twelve-tone composition was revolutionary enough to be extremely recognizable in its theoretical formation. Indeed, it is less surprising that Mann was compelled to add a disclaimer about Schoenberg than it is that he didn't include some form of acknowledgement in the first place. However, Mann did not chart Leverkühn's compositional style on his own. Having moved to Los Angeles in 1941 during his time as a refugee from Adolph Hitler's National Socialist party, Mann, like Schoenberg, was part of the Los Angeles set of political refugees, which also included the critical theorist Theodor Adorno. While working on his own *Philosophy of New Music* (first published in 1949), Adorno worked extensively with Mann during the writing of *Doctor Faustus*. Adorno emphasizes the correlations between Schoenberg's technique and Wagner's work. Though twelve-tone technique is not original to Mann, its immediate applicability in a text that problematizes harmony, time, and synchronicity make it a particularly powerful choice for a musical process. It offers a variety of possibilities for representation within the narrative, as well:

> "A magic square…left to the constellation. The polyphonic value of each tone building a chord would be assured by the larger constellation. […] Reason and magic […] surely meet and become one in what is called wisdom, initiation, in a belief in the stars, in numbers.[261]

Thanks to the "Doctor Faustus" of the title and the appearance of a shadowy figure in the fifteenth chapter, critical attention to Leverkühn's composition process often invokes the idea of the demonic. Karin Crawford stands strongly against this: "it is time we exorcise the devil from Mann's Doktor Faustus because there is no devil in the novel. Adrian's life is not an allegory for a nation in league with the devil on its descent into barbarism. The demonic parallel is more

[261] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 206-208.

appropriately drawn, if at all with Serenus, for Serenus's biography resembles that of Goethe's Faust."[262] I stand with Crawford. In the detailed iteration of Leverkühn's guiding compositional principles, the celestial is also in play. *Doctor Faustus* opens with a quotation from Dante's *Inferno*:

> Lo giorno se n'andava, e l'aer bruno
> togliva gli animai che sono in terra
> dalle fatiche loro, ed io sol uno
> m'apparechiava a sostener la guerra
> sì del cammino e sì della pietate,
> che ritrarrà la mente che non erra.
> O Muse, o alto ingegno, or m'aiutate,
> o mente che scrivesti ciò ch'io vidi,
> qui si parrà la tua nobiltate.[263]

While Dante often conjures images of the descent into the *Inferno*, and indeed, this is the part of the text where this citation comes from, it is important to keep in mind that the overall trajectory of the *Commedia* leads not down, but up. The Goethe, these celestial references, particularly the framing of the union of reason and magic, stars and numbers, can recast elements of a text often considered to be universally dark. There are some opposing viewpoints to this. In *Dodici note del diavolo,* Zurletti stresses that Leverkühn's *Apocalypsis*, which is often considered irrevocably dark, is a summary piece of the entirety of music history even though it is central to the composer's work, it is not the end of his career, but ushering in the final phase of his career: the violin concerto and lamentation of doctor faustus.[264]

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[262] Crawford, "Exorcising the devil from Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus,*" 168.

[263] Alighieri, *I*, 2.1-2.9, Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, prefatory material.

[264] Zurletti, *Le dodici note del diavolo*, 230.

Regardless of its spiritual cast, a twelve-tone composition is a useful tool for novel adaptation thanks to its precise construction and constraints. The entire objective of the practice is to sever the patterns of harmonic relationships between the notes, depending on the perspective, either fracturing their harmonic ties or liberating them.

An intended consequence of this compositional process is that, for its listeners, twelve-tone music is both harder to predict and harder to remember—it is evanescent by design. For Mann, writing about fictional musical masterpieces, these disjointed characteristics serve his narrative aims: a charged musical moment in prose, such as Proust's *"petite phrase",* might strike some as a problematic gap in representation. However, silence and suspension, some of the hallmarks of fictional prose music, are perfectly consonant with the representation of twelve-tone composition: its form and function valorize a sense of suspension.

The method also works especially well to illustrate the thematics of the narrative: while twelve-tone composition seeks a break with historical compositional modes, in its resistance, it exists in palpable dialogue with them. Twelve-tone composition thus offers Mann not only a musical framework, but also a narrative framework for the text as a whole. Mann's heavy-handed montage technique in this text fragments and reconstructs real events and real works of art, untethering them from their surrounding systems of reference. Mann's discursive passages about art and his insertion of a vast range of identifiable sources highlight Mann's process of breaking and re-establishing symbolic association by fracturing, then fusing, events, individuals, and works to one another.

Prosa und Wahrheit

Like d'Annunzio and Proust, Mann inscribes a broad range of both fictional and real-world people and places into the narrative, continually blurring the borders of fiction and reality. Some of the reference points are striking enough in their resonance to encourage readers to assign definitive points of reference to them. But perhaps the defining principle of the references within the text is that the characters do not map with their sources one to one. The confidence with which critics attach source points to the fictional world of the text attests to a desire to establish stability in a text world characterized by instability. Sadly, that desire does not always result in convincing solutions. Mann continually manipulates the presentation of all artistic points of reference, perhaps nowhere more prominently than in the titular reference to Doctor Faustus himself. The full title of the novel is *Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde*. Based on the phrasing and punctuation, most critics take it as inarguable that the "Doctor Faustus" of the title is represented by Adrian Leverkühn. After his death, Leverkühn bequeaths a document to Zeitblom detailing a conversation with a figure often taken for granted to be an incarnation of Mephistopheles. But while the document seems to exist as concrete testimony, there are a number of reasons to question what it represents—was it a hallucination? A real encounter? A function of Leverkühn's illness? A fantasy? Was Leverkühn ill at all? [265]

Mann's adaptational choices in this text are never straightforward. Without the subtitle to condition one's reading, it might be somewhat tempting to assign the character of Faust to

[265] In *The Story of a Novel: The Genesis of* Doktor Faustus*,* Mann asserts that the Faust he is adapting is Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. As in the cases of Wagner, d'Annunzio, and Proust, any reference such as this must be taken more as indicative of Mann's desire to present himself and his work in a particular way than it is of any objective fact. (Again, in German, *Genesis* is subtitled "Roman eines Romans": "Novel of a novel.")

Zeitblom. Zeitblom exhibits the characteristic world-weariness of Faust; Zeitblom is a scholar by trade and training; Zeitblom memorably describes himself, before even giving his name, as "*conjuratus* of the Latin host". Zeitblom, like Goethe's *Faust* (in part II), is married to a "splendid" Helene, about whom he confesses:

> at the risk of bringing a smile to the reader's face, I will admit that the glowing young lady's first name, Helene—such precious syllables—played a not insignificant role in my choice as well. Such a name implies a consecration, the pure magic of which is not to be denied, even should the appearance of her who bears it satisfy its lofty claims only in a modest, middle-class fashion—and then only fleetingly, for the charms of youth are quick to fade.[266]

The Spartan Helen is a fixture in all of the most prominent Faust iterations, perhaps nowhere more poetically than Christopher Marlowe, whose Faustus exclaims:

> Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
> Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
> Her lips suck forth my soul; see where it flies!
> Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
> Here will I dwell, for Heaven be in these lips,
> And all is dross that is not Helena.[267]

The idea of Helen as a reclaiming force for the soul is provocative, but the most crucial component of Helen in all of the versions of the Faust legend, from the German chapbook forward, is that desire for her is sparked primarily based upon artistic representations of her. As Marlowe's First Scholar notes to Faustus:

> We have determined with ourselves that Helen of Greece was the admirablest lady that ever lived: therefore, Master Doctor, if you will do us that favor, as to let us see that peerless dame of Greece, whom all the world admires for majesty, we

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[266] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 12.

[267] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 52.

should think ourselves much beholding unto you.[268]

Helen, in her status as mythic object of desire, is also a site of communicable desire, desire transferred by reading or listening to accounts of her greatness. We may read her presence here not as serving as an icon for human beauty, but for the ability of storytelling to transform the world outside the text (even if here, awkwardly, it transforms the world within yet another text). Just as artworks and characters' affections for artworks drove patterns of desire in the *Recherche*, literary and musical objects drive patterns of narrative desire in *Doctor Faustus*.

Teacher as critic

Zeitblom is a useful construct as the narrator of Leverkühn's desires, as he is able to chart the youthful exposure and atmospheric conditions that drive Leverkühn's ambitions. The entirety of the eighth chapter replicates in great detail the lectures given by Wendell Kretzschmar, the music teacher of Leverkühn's (and Zeitblom's) youth. Kretzschmar's observations, like the musical and artistic manifesti in the works of d'Annunzio and Proust, offer a lens through which to interpret the music constructed in *Doctor Faustus*. In one particularly applicable presentation, entitled "Music and the Eye,":

> [Kretzschmar] spoke of his art insofar as it appeals to the sense of sight, or rather appeals to it as well, which it already does, so he explained in that it is written out—-that is, in musical notation, the alphabet of tones, which since the days of the old neumes (a fixed system of strokes and dots that more or less suggested the flow of sound) had been employed continually and with ever-increasing precision. […] He spoke of the purely optical effect of written music and assured us that one glance at the notation sufficed for an expert to gain a definitive impression of a composition's spirit and quality. It had once happened that some dilettante's concoction he had received lay open on his music stand

[268] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 49.

> just as a visiting colleague had entered the room and, while still at the door, called out "For God's sake, what sort of trash is that you have there?" On the other hand, he described for us the ravishing joy that just the visual image of a Mozart score provides the practiced eye—the clarity of its disposition, the lovely allocation among instrumental groups, the clever command of the rich transformations in the melodic line. A deaf man, he shouted, someone with no experience of sound, would surely have to take delight in such sweet visions. "To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit," he said, quoting a Shakespeare sonnet, and claimed composers in every age had tucked away some things in their notation that were meant more for the reading eye than for the ear.[269]

By using a music teacher early on in the text to advance the possibility of music for the eyes, Mann primes readers to engage with fictional musical works set out exclusively in visual terms.[270] By Kretzschmar's reckoning, there is nothing problematic at all about reading music on the page—its lack of sound resonance adds to its value rather than reduces it. (Kretschmar's own propensity of stammering seems an excellent supplementary justification for his valuation of writing over speech.) Kretzschmar is the ideal companion to novel music, as he frames the page as the ideal form. Kretzschmar goes beyond even this, though, to the idea of music as abstraction:

> He introduced several more such Pythagorean jokes, intended more for the eye than the ear, hoodwinking the ear so to speak, in which music had indulged ever and again, and disclosed that, in the final analysis, he attributed them to the art's inherent lack of sensuality, indeed to its anti-sensualism, to a secret bias toward asceticism. Indeed, it was the most intellectual of all the arts, which was evident from the fact that in music, as in no other art, form and content were intertwined, were absolutely one and the same. One might very well say music "appeals to the ear"; but it did so only in a qualified sense—that is, only in those instances where hearing, like any other sense, acted as the conduit, the receptive organ for the intellectual content. But in fact there existed music that did not reckon at all with ever being heard. That was the case with a six-voiced canon by J. B. Bach, in which he had reworked a thematic idea by Frederick

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[269] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 66-67.

[270] In a charming corollary that further underscores the link between music and the visual world, another regular attendee at Kretzschmar's lectures is the apprentice violinmaker to Leverkühn's uncle, Luca Cimabue, who "did indeed carry the family name of that thirteenth-century painter of madonnas." (Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 43.)

> the Great. In it one had a piece that was intended for neither the human voice nor any known instrument, indeed for no sense-based realization whatever, but that was music *per se*, music as pure abstraction. Perhaps, Kretzschmar said, it was music's deepest desire not to be heard at all, not even seen, not even felt, but, if that were possible, to be perceived and viewed in some intellectually pure fashion, in some realm beyond the senses, beyond the heart even. Except, being bound to the world of sense, in then must again strive for its most intense, indeed bewitching sensual realization, like a Kundry who does not wish to do what she does and yet flings soft arms around the neck of the fool. It found its most powerful, sensual realization in orchestral music, where, entering through the ear, it seemed to affect all the sense, to act as an opiate, allowing the pleasures of the realm of sound to melt with those of color and fragrance. Here indeed it played the role of the penitent in the garb of the sorceress.[271]

In several respects, this passage articulates the culmination of the efforts at prose music initiated by d'Annunzio and Proust. It seems to speak directly to the possibility of intellectual music, music that bypasses the need for training and technique in the reader—the possibility of a music beyond sensation, a music beyond music. But the description is particularly provocative with reference to this project because it brings Richard Wagner's Kundry into the conversation. That is, while elaborating upon the idea of pure musical asceticism, it conjures not only one of music's great icons of decadence but one of his most erotically charged characters Kundry, who casts her spell in the Wagnerian gestures of both *Il fuoco* and *À la recherche du temps perdu,* appears here as a signpost for both protagonist and reader. Like Helen, Kundry symbolizes the danger and destruction that can be brought about by erotic desire.[272]

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[271] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 67-8.

[272] Brigitte Prutti notes that in Mann, "all of the female characters are reduced to a few—mostly ambivalent — functions. they are mothers, seducers, potential wives, devoted admirers. The relative diversity of roles cannot conceal the fact that that ultimately all women are merely subservient figures: in their devotion, maternal care, sexual "impregnation," loving empathy, they are being used for the sake of elitist production of art. The presented 'roles' themselves are male projections of female modes of being." (Prutti, "Women Characters in *Doctor Faustus,*" *Thomas Mann's Doctor Faustus: A Novel at the Margin of Modernism*, 111-112.)

Indeed, danger and contamination seem to loom behind every corner in *Doctor Faustus*—it is generally accepted to be a deeply pessimistic work. Though some of its political details are oblique (Hitler's name never appears, for instance), its references to National Socialism are clear enough to make obvious the devastation of the political world that had rendered Thomas Mann a refugee. However, Kretzschmar's lectures, alongside a number of Mann's other intertextual references and staging dimensions, lead me to read this text as less tragic than it might first appear. If Kundry is an emblem of female lust and contamination, she also embodies the possibility of compassion, renunciation, and sacrifice. Kundry's sickness (in the opera's estimation) leads her to redemption. In a text in which the protagonist's biographical resemblance to Nietzsche is particularly remarkable (and of all the vast references present within the body of the narrative, Nietzsche's name is conspicuously absent,) Nietzsche's own strong feelings regarding *Parsifal* in general and Kundry's role in particular seem to enter into natural dialogue with her presence here.But Nietzsche took issue with Wagner's presentation of the Kundry/Parsifal narrative in part precisely because it led toward salvation rather than doom. (His issue was that the salvation was insincere.) Within these frames, we might find glimpses of hope for the text (and its weary reader). Kretzschmar's ideas are of particular value because they will shape Leverkühn's musical output, and Kretzschmar's optimism is as contagious as any other quality we see expressed in the plot.

Docudrama

With so many different voices and points of reference clamoring for attention in the novel's soundscape, another montage strategy inserts some needed material clarity. Several of the

narrative's most dramatic points are conveyed not through the direct testimony of the narrator, Zeitblom, but in the form of the documentary incursions he notes from the outset: most importantly, the letters and journals of Leverkühn himself. The inclusion of documents is of particular interest in a text problematizing text-music relations because documents are a site of potential disjunction between the reception of music and the reception of narrative. Indeed, even the value of written documents of music as a vessel for music is a subject of critical inquiry. However, Mann works throughout the narrative to suture musical reception to visual perception — whether score, document, letters, or visual art — and this dynamic helps lend additional symbolic weight to documentary evidence.[273]

Documents are of particular value in helping the reader to negotiate Zeitblom's wavering narrative voice, which persistently questions its ability to represent reality effectively — twenty-one of the forty-seven chapters (plus epilogue) begin with some form of meditation on the narrator's success or failure as a storyteller. Inserted documents thus anchor both the plot and the voice of the protagonist. Zeitblom quotes periodically from selections of the letters of Leverkühn and (less frequently) his friends and collaborators, but these incursions are generally incorporated into the broader sections in which they appear almost as regular dialogue. Zeitblom uses Leverkühn's actual dialogue as well, occasionally elaborating upon his ability to remember spoken details verbatim, as reliably as if they had been written. However, the text provides just

[273] The nuances in the presentation of his own text itself don't escape Zeitblom's visual analysis, as he notes in his commentary on chapter divisions: " * Asterisks, too, serve to refresh the reader's eye and mind—it does not always require a Roman numeral, which gives a new section of its own to the foregoing excursus on a present that Adrian Leverkühn did not himself experience. Having organized the printed layout with a familiar device, I will complete this section [...] though I do not deceive myself that my procedure makes it look as if the material lacks unity as a chapter, as if it consists of quite heterogeneous parts—but, then, my failure to do any better thus far would surely have sufficed for that." (Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 187.)

two instances of documents that are presented complete and unedited. These happen within a cluster of documentary insertions spanning chapters fifteen through twenty-seven. Just before they appear, we see excerpts from a letter sent to Leverkühn by Kretzschmar to encourage him in his pursuit of music over his previous studies in theology. The final section reads:

> "It is better to get a headache from practicing canons, fugues, and counterpoint, than from rebutting Kant's rebuttal of the proofs for God's existence. Enough of this playing the theological virgin!"
>
> Virginity, though fine, needs motherhood to hallow
> What else is but a sad and barren field left fallow."
>
> The letter concluded with this quotation from Cherubini's *Wayfarer,* and looking up from it, my eyes met Adrian's mischievous smile.[274]

These small insertions both solidify the voices of the supporting characters and establish with greater clarity the tone of the relationships between characters, including their tendency, as in Proust, to communicate with each other via citation and projection into the literary (sometimes operatic) works of others. On both macro and micro levels, the characters use their knowledge of existing art forms to frame their lives.

As Zeitblom's depictions of Leverkühn's friends are often colored with jealousy or judgment, documentary fragments help to offer an unfiltered view. However, Leverkühn's excerpted letters are also palpably tailored to suit Zeitblom's aims and views (at several points he also makes reference to documents from Leverkühn's friends that he refuses to include). In contrast, two unabridged documents, both from Leverkühn's hand, are framed by Zeitblom's resistance to them. The first is a letter written about Leverkühn's trip to a brothel shortly after moving to Leipzig. Zeitblom is troubled by every part of the letter, including the visit itself, but

[274] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 145.

among all the dimensions of the visit, part of what bothers him is the style of the letter—it is written in an antiquated style upon which Zeitblom projects a host of interpretations:

> I shall preface his answer simply by saying that its antiquated prose is, of course, intended as a parody, an allusion to his own quaint experiences in Halle and to the linguistic deportment of Ehrenfried Kumpf—at the same time, however, it also expresses his personality; it is a self-stylization, a manifestation of his inner disposition and of a highly characteristic tendency to hide behind and find fulfillment in parody.
>
> Leipzig, the Friday after The Purification, 1905
> in Peter Strasse, House number 27
>
> To my honorable, erudite, esteemed, beneficent Master and Ballistier!
>
> We are obliged and grateful for your perturbation and epistle and for having given us lively and most comical tidings of your present dapper, dull, and demanding state, of your caperings and curry-combings, your polishings and musketings. […]
> Twixt you and me, the study of harmony results in many a yawn, whereas I am immediately quickened by counterpoint, cannot play enough amusing pranks in that magic arena, solve its never-ceasing problems with lusty fervor and have already cobbled a whole pile of droll studies in the canon and fugue, thereby garnering some praise from my master. It is productive work, arousing fantasy and invention, for a domino game of chords which lacks all theme is, methinks, fit for neither washing nor cooking. Were it not better for one to learn all that—suspension, passing tones, modulations, preparations, and resolutions—*in praxi*, from hearing, from experience and self-discovery, rather than from some book?[275]

After providing this prelude to his activities, Leverkühn proceeds to account for his first tour of Leipzig by the porter who "led (him) astray" on a tour around town. He visits locations framed by their relationship with J. S. Bach and Goethe before asking to be led to an inn, which the porter does with a wink.

> I ring, the door opens of itself, and through the entry a dame in gaudy dress approaches, with rosy-hued cheeks, a rosary of waxy-hued pearls across her bulk, and greets me with almost coy demeanor, piping high sweet pleasure and dallying with me as one long awaited, escorts me then through portières into a shimmering chamber with walls

[275] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 148-150.

> paneled in cloth, a crystal chandelier, sconces at mirrors, and silken couches, upon which there sit waiting for you the nymphs and daughters of the wilderness, six or seven—how shall I put it—morphos, clearwings, esmeraldas, scantily clad, transparently clad in tulle, gossamer, and glister; their long hair falling free, hair with lovelocks, powdered demiglobes, arms with bracelets, and gazing at you with eyes expectant and asparkle with chandelier light.
>
> Gazing at me, not you. That churl, that ale-house knight Schleppfuss, had led me to a bawdyhouse! I stand up and hide my sentiment, behold opposite me a piano standing open—a friend—tread straightway cross the carpet and, still standing, strike two, three chords, and know well what they were, for that phenomenon of sound was in full possession of my thoughts. Modulation from B major to C major, a brightening by one half-step, as in the hermit's prayer in the finale of the *Freischütz,* when tympani, trumpets, and hautboys enter on the fourth and sixth intervals of C. Know that now, afterwards, though knew it not at the time, but simply struck the keys. There steps to my side a nut-brown lass, in Spanish jacket, with large mouth, stubbed nose, and almond eyes—Esmeralda, who strokes my cheek with her arm. I turn about, thrust the bench aside with my knee, and stride back across the carpet, through this hell-hole of lusts, past the vaunting bawdstrot, through the entry, and down the stairs into the street, never touching the rail of brass.[276]

Several details of this encounter are particularly interesting to this study—the first, that Leverkühn attempts to escape the attention of the women in the brothel by playing a passage from *Der Freischütz* on the piano. (Mann is not often lauded for his humor, but it is hard to avoid amusement at this description, particularly amidst the grandiloquent linguistic backdrop.) Music, the piano in particular, serves as an escape. The intertextuality of *Freischütz* is provocative as well: the opera's narrative follows the path of a shooting contest in which magic bullets are forged and used in a contest. Though dark forces intervene in the with these bullets, at the end of the opera, the protagonist is saved from a demonic fate by the intervention of a pious hermit. The figure of the pious hermit will be present in oblique ways throughout *Doctor Faustus*, as well,

[276] Mann, *Doctor Faustus,* 151-152.

and it is one more reason that I hesitate to follow tradition in deeming this work tragic. Once again, in my opinion, the intertextual incursions seem to point to a different resolution.

The inclusion of *Freischütz* also bears important resonance with Leverkühn's ideas. Leverkühn will state later in the text that he wishes to pull music composition away from the unity of music and words championed by Wagner. Wagner particularly valorized Beethoven's Ninth Symphony because of the way that words spring out organically from the symphonic content.

Retraction of narrative

In describing his final composition, *The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus*, Leverkühn speaks of his desire to retract Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, leaving behind vocal expression while descending into the depths of the orchestra. In a sense, this also unmakes the biblical account of creation—removing "let there be light" and allowing the chaos of non-differentiation to reign. However, Leverkühn's description of his piano performance at the brothel reveals a vital counter-point to the assertion that words in a composition could be retractable. Even a passing reference to a chord progression from *Freischütz* being played, wordless, on a piano, conjures the narrative, verbal associations of its point of origin. It is not just the musical progression that Leverkühn describes that exists as an intertextual reference, but the words originally tied to those notes, which are silent here. This is pertinent to Leverkühn's later compositional ambitions, as well. A work for orchestra that is linked to the Faust myth, even if only by title, can never be truly wordless for any listener who knows the Faust story, no matter which version of the story, no matter whether words are written on its score. This dynamic of

invisible musical inscription will be vital in the text's elucidation of Leverkühn's musical practices.

Framing Esmeralda

In my analysis of the prose stagecraft of d'Annunzio and Proust, I focused a great deal on the insertion of concrete visual referents to frame the visual worlds of the narratives. In the case of d'Annunzio, this elaboration was largely concerned with recognizable visual arts and architecture. Proust expanded upon d'Annunzio's systematic use of visual references in art and architecture while expanding his reach to fashion and to mediated representations of works (paintings of architecture, writings of art). I argue that all these systems of visual referents help to establish these prose publications as multimedia works. Mann's practice is slightly different. In *Doctor Faustus*, Mann does employ references from fine art and architecture, some roughly in line with the usage of d'Annunzio and Proust. In addition, Mann places an intense focus on the visual elements of written text and music. I will return to all of these practices later in this study. However, here, of particular importance is the use of visual referents within the natural world. In Leverkühn's description of the women at the brothel, he coyly uses the terms "morphos, clearwings, esmeraldas." The reader has encountered these names before, in the earliest chapters that detail Leverkühn's youth.

As Leverkühn's childhood friends looked on, the boy's father, an enthusiastic observer of entomology, would show the children his books:

> [He] would point with his forefinger at the splendors and oddities pictured there: the papilios and morphos of the tropics, flitting along, somber and radiant, in all the colors

> of the palette, configured and patterned with the most exquisite taste any artisan could ever invent—insects that in their fantastically exaggerated beauty eke out an ephemeral life and some of which native peoples consider to be evil spirits that bear malaria. The most glorious hue that they flaunted, an azure of dreamlike beauty, was, so Jonathan explained, not a real or genuine color, but was produced by delicate grooves and other variations on the scaly surface of their wings, a device in miniature that could exclude most of the light rays and bend others so that only the most radiant blue light reached our eyes. [...] There were illustrated clearwings with no scales on their wings, which resemble delicate glass threaded with a net of darker veins. One such butterfly, whose transparent nakedness makes it a lover of dusky, leafy shade, is called *Hetaera esmeralda*, its wings smudged with just a dark splash of violet and pink, so that in flight, with nothing else visible, it imitates a windblown petal.[277] [278]

In his conversations with his father about the natural defenses of butterflies, Leverkühn's father focuses on the potential dissonance between appearance and reality. One butterfly is garishly decorated in order to advertise its poisonous interior; another merely borrows the semblance of danger from the originator; it is beautiful, but not deadly. If d'Annunzio and Proust insert visual aids in order to create concrete references, Mann employs the visual, then seeds the possibility for distrust in it. This incitement to distrust in symbols as they are presented permeates every component of the pivotal encounters of the first half of the book, especially Leverkühn's two visits to a brothel and Leverkühn's self-documented dialogue with a figure of unknown origin.

The first visit to a brothel ends with a quasi-comical departure and a shift to normalize this event (Zeitblom remarks that Leverkühn's grandiose style drops away once he has written himself away from the brothel). However, Leverkühn's pivotal return trip to the brothel is marked by drama. This encounter is told exclusively in Zeitblom's hand—there is no document

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[277] For a reference to the actual butterfly, see: Thayer, *Concealing-coloration in the animal kingdom: An exposition of the laws of disguise through color and pattern: Being a summary of Abbot. H. Thayer's disclosures*, 224.

[278] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 17.

to substantiate the action. The text is based on Zeitblom's memories of conversations with Leverkühn.

> Adrian returned to that place on account of one particular person, the one whose touch still burned on his cheek, the "nut-brown lass" in the jacket and with the large mouth, who had approached him at the piano and whom he called Esmeralda. (...)
> My hand is indeed trembling as I write, but I will say what I know in calm, collected words--always consoled to some degree by the thought I welcomed before, the thought of choice, the thought that something resembling the bond of love reigned here, lending some shimmer of human soul to the union of this precious young man with that ill-fated creature, To be sure, this comforting thought is linked inseparably to another, all the more dreadful one: that here, once and for all, love and poison were joined as a single experience, as a mythological unity embodied in the arrow.
>
> It would appear that the poor creature's heart had feelings that responded to those the young man extended to her. There is no doubt she recalled her transient visitor from a year before. Her approaching him to stroke his cheek with her bared arm may have been the vulgarly tender expression of her susceptibility for everything that set him apart from her usual clientele. She learned from his own lips that he had made this long journey for her sake, and she thanked him--by warning him against her body. I know this from Adrian himself: She warned him; and does that not imply a gratifying disparity between the creature's higher humanity and that physical part of her, the vile commodity of trade cast to the gutter? The hapless woman warned the man who desired her against "herself" --and that means an act of the soul freely elevating itself above her pitiful physical existence, a humane act of distancing herself from it, and act of compassion, and act, if I may be permitted the word, of love. And, good heavens, was it not love as well--or or what was it, what obsession, what act of will reckless recklessly tempting God, what impulse to incorporate the punishment in the sin, or finally, what most deeply secreted desire to receive and conceive the demonic, to unleash a deadly chemical change within his own body was it--that caused him, though warned, to spurn the warning and insist on possessing that flesh?[279]

Most critical appraisals take for granted here that Leverkühn contracts syphilis from the prostitute he calls Esmeralda and that the mental changes brought on by the progression of the disease empower his artistic creativity while bringing about his physical decline. However, there is reason to doubt all of the details of this encounter. Even in Zeitblom's telling, it is clear that

[279] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 164-165.

there may have existed an infection and an opportunity to become infected, but there is never any subsequent confirmation of disease. All of these details exist only within the realm of possibility, not of confirmation. In a book absolutely fixated upon documentation, this dynamic is left uncertain. Though he has placed some emphasis on learning from Leverkühn all the details he has recounted, here, Zeitblom begins to editorialize freely:

> I have never been able to think of that encounter without a religious shudder—for in that embrace, one party forfeited his salvation, the other found hers. The traveler from afar refused to reject her no matter what the risk--and to the wretched girl that must have come as a purifying, justifying, elevating blessing; and it appeared that she offered him all the sweetness of her womanhood in repayment for what he was risking for her. She saw to it that he would never forget her; but he, who would never see her again, never forgot her for his own sake, either, and her name--the one he had given her from the beginning--haunts his work like a rune, legible to no one but me.[280]

Here, Esmeralda becomes entwined with Leverkühn's artistic ambitions. The interpretations of this scene get wild. George Reinhardt asserts in "Doctor Faustus, A Wagnerian Novel,"

> "As Isolde risks her life for her love, Leverkühn will live boldly in sacrificing his health for his art. His enigmatic smile when he sees how the music has moved Zeitblom to tears goes beyond mere condescension to the recognition that he, as a modern Tristan, has kindled a lifelong love in the prostitute Esmeralda and that he must, like Tristan, pay with his life.[281]

This seems the very definition of overreaching to me. To best explore this conflation of erotic body and artistry, let us move forward somewhat, to the central documentary moment of the text —Leverkühn's handwritten description of a Faustian encounter during his time in Palestrina, Italy. Zeitblom's introduction ratchets up the impact of this encounter with melodramatic zeal:

> The document to which repeated reference has been made in these pages, Adrian's secret manuscript, in my possession since his demise and guarded like a precious, dreadful

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[280] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 165.

[281] Reinhardt, *"Doctor Faustus, A Wagnerian Novel,"* 112.

> treasure—here it is, I shall confide it now. [...] It goes without saying that I do not intend to surrender Adrian's manuscript to the printer. With my own quill I shall transcribe my text, word for word, from music paper covered with the dark black strokes of the same script I described once before.[282]

Before entering into the encounter itself, it is worth emphasizing the physical dimensions of the framing of the document: 1) Zeitblom's emphasis that he would re-copy the manuscript himself rather than consign it to the printer and 2) The fact that the scene is transcribed on music paper rather than unlined paper. Zeitblom's obsessive focus on material record and exegesis finally give way to some apparent confirmation of the malady of the woman Leverkühn refers to as Esmeralda.

> *He*: The proper planets met together in the house of the Scorpion, just as a most well-instructed Master Dürer drew it for his medicinal broadsheet, and there arrived in German lands the small delicate folk, living corkscrews, our dear guests from the Indies, the flagellants—you prick up your ears, do you not? As if I spoke of the vagabonding guild of penitents, scourging their backs for their own and all mankind's sins. But I mean the flagellates, the tiny imperceptible sort, which have flails, like our pale Venus—the *spirocheta pallida*, that is the true sort. But right you are, it sounds so snugly like the High Middle Age and its *flagellum hareticorum fascinariorum*. Ah, yes, they may well prove to be *fascinarii*, our revelers—in better cases, such as yours.[283]

Many readers take this as an outright reference to Leverkühn having contracted the *Treponema pallidum* bacteria, and that certainly seems to be implied here, but it's important to note that the text itself never fully confirms infection. In previous iterations of the Faust legend, Faust enters into a contract with Mephistopheles, one sometimes signed in blood. Blood is central to the staged "contract" of *Doctor Faustus*, too, but rather than asking Leverkühn's to sign blood on a

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[282] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 165.

[283] Mann, *Doctor Faustus,* 247.

document to indicate his consent, his conversation partner states that the contract is already within his blood; again, seemingly referring to an infection:

> [W]e were diligent that you should run into our arms, which is to say: the arms of my little one, of Esmeralda, and that you should come by it, by that illumination, the aphrodisiac of the brain, after which you so very desperately longed with body and soul and mind. In short, betwixt us there need be no four crossway in the Spesser Forest and no circles. We are in league and in business. With your blood you have certified it and promised yourself to us and are baptized ours—this visit of mine is intended merely for confirmation. From us you have taken time, genius time, high-flying time, a full twenty-four years *ab dato recessi,* which we set as your bound. And when they are over and their course run, the which cannot be foreseen, and such a time is likewise and eternity—you shall be fetched. In recompense of which we will meanwhile be subject and obedient to you in all things, and hell shall profit you, if you but renounce all who live, all the heavenly host and all men, for that must be.[284]

Leverkühn's infection and contract opens up a wide range of attractive possibilities in drawing this text into alignment with my arguments in previous chapters. Wagner's fixation with a "dangerous" presentation of female sexuality and his persistent avoidance of representations of motherhood in all of his operas are adapted with vigor into the representations of sexuality, gestation, and caretaking in both d'Annunzio and Proust. D'Annunzio emphasizes Foscarina's assumed infertility in order to claim gestation as the domain of his poet-hero Effrena. Proust's depiction of legacy is more complex, incorporating portraits of genetic descendants and artistic progeny that disappoint or thrill their parental figures, alongside a comprehensive sample population of wide-ranging sexual practices and caretaking arrangements. Mann, however, has found a solution that enables him to physically impregnate his male protagonist. (Or, at the very least, to simulate it.) Leverkühn believes that he has been physically inoculated with a sexually transmitted disease, and he believes this disease will give him 24 years of enhanced artistic

[284] Mann, *Doctor Faustus,* 264-265.

creativity. In this process, remarkably, it is the female who sows, the male body that is the site of gestation. The offspring of this process will be art and death.

Even this interpretation contains within it the seeds of doubt—it is implied, but not explicit, from the text that Adrian contracts syphilis from Esmeralda. It is my position that this lack of certainty is essential in reading the text—if we take the infection as narrative "fact", we miss the point. What is vital is that both Zeitblom and Leverkühn are fixated upon the idea that a) Leverkühn has entered into an arrangement with a demonic figure and b) Leverkühn has contracted syphilis in concert with this arrangement. It is important that the reader might doubt these elements, but it is also vital that the two characters subscribe to their aestheticized narrative trajectories (connected, as they are, to the Faust legend, to Nietzsche, and beyond). The doubt enables readers to perceive that Leverkühn and Zeitblom's stories are not merely self-evident, but that the characters are actively shaping their lives in the shadow of German cultural identity.

Staging fanfic

The dynamic of doubt for the reader, in tandem with the characters' fixation upon outside narrative references, problematizes the ways in which storytelling, documentation, and reading can, themselves, become the sites of infection. It is upon this point that one of Mann's most interesting plot developments hinges. Mann uses Leverkühn's assumption of his infection and demonic contract to concoct a method for inscribing messages in his compositions, which Zeitblom recognizes, and chronicles with pride.

> [T]hough it may be taken as vanity on my part, I cannot refrain at this point from noting a discovery he would one day confirm, although by his silence. Leverkühn was not the first composer, nor will he have been the last, who loved to insert secret messages as formulas or logograms in his work, revealing music's innate predilection for superstitious rites and observances charged with mystic numbers and alphabetical symbols. And thus within my friend's tonal tapestry there is conspicuously frequent use of a figure, a sequence of five or six notes, that begins with H (which Anglo-Saxons call a B) and ends on an Es (known in the English-speaking world as E-flat), with E and A alternating in between—a basic motif with an oddly melancholy sound that pervades his music in a variety of harmonic and rhythmic disguises, assigned now to one voice, not to another, often in its inverted form, as if turned on its axis, with the intervals still the same, but with the notes in reverse sequence. It appears first in what is probably the most beautiful of the thirteen Brentano lieder, all composed while he was still in Leipzig, in the heart-wrenching song: "Oh sweet maiden, how bad you are," which is totally governed by the motif; and then in the late work, with its unique blend of boldness and despair, most especially in *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*, which was written in Pfeiffering and displays to an even greater extent a tendency to present those melodic intervals in harmonic simultaneity.
>
> And that encoded sound reads as: H-E-A-E-Es: *Hetaera esmeralda.*[285]

Zeitblom's description of the *Hetaera esmeralda* motif does what most prose music does not do, that is, give replicable instructions as to the pitches (if not the rhythm) of a work of fictional music. But what is most interesting about Zeitblom's "discovery" is that its importance is revealed not in its musical form (in which its existence is invisible) but in the translation of musical notation into words. This embedded code functions like a composer's written stage directions—it can emerge in performance, but it is imperceptible to an audience in its original form. Mann achieves something truly singular here—while offering schematic details to assist the reader in formulating the text music, he sets words as the motivator of pitch. Mann's model enables the production of literal word as music.

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[285] Mann, *Doctor Faustus,* 166.

Reams of critics have commented on Mann's use of musical forms to generate structure for his works. However, the vast majority of these examinations function on the level of metaphor. Here, Mann offers a code to translate letters into actual sound—this practical tool offers the connection between text and sound that the other references lack.Zeitblom's examination of Leverkühn's hidden motif also reframes word as the generative medium for sound, rather than attempting to replicate sound with word. In a text that problematizes the ways in which individuals might use cultural works to map their life stories, the creation of music based on the sounds associated with letters in a word also highlights the possibilities for self-inscription into non-verbal media.

The overlay of narrative iteration and source material becomes ever more complex as Zeitblom analyzes Leverkühn's "documentary evidence" of his encounter (real or imagined). The layers of artifice and deconstruction are difficult to distinguish, for each iteration of the legend takes on the mantle of all of the foregoing iterations, but the fractured representations of character multiply these associations. If Mann understands the most vital component of 12-tone composition as the liberation of notes from their harmonic position, then the liberation of symbols from their expected symbolic roles would be most characteristic of this practice. I read Mann's intertexts as operating in a similar fashion in the novel—because references are obvious, but also partial and multiplicative, symbols such as Faust are both conjured from previous versions and atomized. Mann both resurrects and silences these echoes.

As in the case of Schoenberg's harmonic technique, this tactic is possible in part because of the large degree of resonance between Mann's characters and their sources. Extrapolating twelve themes out all the possible themes in the world and combining them at intervals in the

text does not seem to me to exert a parallel effect to that of Schoenberg's technique—the reason 12-tone composition works the way it does is that there are a fixed number of tones to work with. The technique, when applied to words, cannot function the same way. But if we take as our goal not the importance of the number 12, but the liberation of common figures from their symbolic associations, we can find more fruitful ground from which to work.[286]

Performance and suspension

I argue that it is Mann's use of intertextual references, in the process of Wagnerian amalgamation practiced by d'Annunzio and Proust, that best replicates the function of Schoenberg's 12-tone composition. These references almost never map evenly on to their reference points—when we encounter them, we believe we know what they represent. However, when we push at the margins of these allusions, the clarity disappears. Intertextual references give Mann the material he needs to construct a breakable series of codes, offering a sense of narrative suspension for the reader that parallels that which 12-tone composition provides the ear.

The idea of suspension resonates strongly with Wagner's own practices and objectives and it has been a primary focus of my analysis of d'Annunzio and Proust, as well. Mann's staging of the centrality of music to the narrative is even stronger than that of d'Annunzio or Proust, in part because his protagonist is a composer first. But he also intensifies the use of suspension proper, not only in his appropriation of 12-tone composition, but in Adrian's climactic final performance:

[286] I do believe the examination of medieval practices such as numerology is of crucial importance in assessing *Doctor Faustus*, so I do not dismiss this lightly. However, I think the most essential dynamic at play in Mann's usage of 12-tone composition in this text is not the number 12 per se, but the breaking, recombining, and liberating of relationships between artworks and ideas.

> On the music desk of the square piano against the wall, lay the opened score of *The Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*. [...]
>
> "But since the time I once purchased for my soul has now run out, I have summoned you to me before my end is come, kindly beloved brethren and sisters, and will not conceal from you my ghostly decease. And beseech you therefore that you would keep me in good remembrance, and also convey brotherly greetings to others whom I have forgotten to invite, and think moreover nothing ill of me. All this said and confessed, I will in farewell play you some few things from the structure that I heard from Satan's sweet instrument, and which in part the craftly children sang for me." He stood up, pale as death. [...]
>
> Leverkühn, surrounded by the three women, but also by Schildknapp, Helene, and me, had sat down at the brown square piano and began to smooth the pages of the score with his right hand. We saw tears trickle down his cheeks and fall on the keys, which, though wet, were now struck in a strongly dissonant chord. At the same time he opened his mouth as if to sing, but from between his lips there emerged only a wail that still rings in my ears. Bending over the instrument, he spread his arms wide as if to embrace it and suddenly, as if pushed, fell sideways from his chair to the floor. [287]

Leverkühn's performance offers no potential for harmonic development because it consists of a single chord, struck on the piano and accompanied by his voice. Leverkühn's final work stands as a testament to his desire, after the death of his nephew Nepomuk, to take back:

> "the good and the noble…what people call human, even though it is good and noble. What people have fought for, have stormed citadels for, and what people filled to overflowing have announced with jubilation—it ought not be. It will be taken back. I shall take it back."
>
> "I don't quite understand, my dear fellow. What do you want to take back?"
>
> "The Ninth Symphony," he replied.[288]

Leverkühn's performance, in contrast, is not a progression, but a single, simultaneous chord and cry. The narrative is particularly precise regarding the physical orientation and haptic conditions of this scene—Leverkühn's trinity of female supporters, his tears on the keys, the presence of the score, the embrace of the piano. After this episode, Leverkühn enters into an inert state. He is

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[287] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 519, 527.

[288] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 501.

cared for first by friends, then, eventually, by his mother. In every respect, this final performance operates as a suspension: one polytone chord rings out; one wordless vocal cry escapes; Adrian's life is stalled. No time can be measured, because no series of syllables advances to mark its passing. In performance, this moment is frozen in suspension—there is no series of notes, as there is only one strike of the keys; no passage of syllables into meaning as words; only one cry and embrace.

Zeitblom's narration brings the text to an abrupt halt after Adrian's final performance: his mediation is complete.

> It is done. An old man, bent, almost broken by the horrors of the time in which he wrote and by those that are the subject of what he has written, gazes with wavering satisfaction at the large pile of enlivened paper that is the work of his diligence, the product of years thronged with both memories and current events. A task has been accomplished for which I am by nature not the right man, to which I was not born, but have been called by love, loyalty, and my role as an eyewitness. What those can achieve, what devotion can do, that has been done—I must be content with that.
>
> As I sat down to write these memoirs, this biography of Adrian Leverkühn, there existed in regards to its author--but also in regards to the artistry of its hero--not the least prospect of their ever being made public. But now that the monster state that at the time held this continent, and more besides, in its tentacles has celebrated its last orgies, now that its matadors have had themselves poisoned by their doctors, then drenched in gasoline and set on fire so that nothing whatever might remain of them--now, I say, might be possible to think of the publication of my mediatorial work.[289]

After Leverkühn's virtuosic display of both narrative and biological suspension, a moment of pure performance, Zeitblom returns to problematize his role as scribe and mediator. This is, in essence, the unifying complexity in all of the texts that replicate Wagner—how to render pure experience on flat paper.

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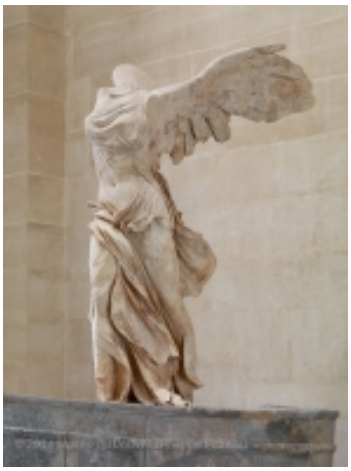
[289] Mann, *Doktor Faustus*, 528.

For an assist, let us turn to Dante, Mann's epigrammatic frame author. In the opening epigram from *Inferno*, as in many other parts of the *Commedia*, Dante repeatedly calls out to the muses and to his intellect, to help him to speak of the wonders (and horrors) that he encountered, sights that challenge even the bounds of language. Having tackled the ear, let us explore the eye. Mann use of visual referents in *Doktor Faustus* does not, on the surface, seem as prominent a technique as it was in d'Annunzio and Proust. Part of this is illusory; Mann's literary and musical references form such a dense tapestry of representation that they tend to steal focus. However, there are visual referents at play in the text, as well. The most prominent references are a triptych of Albrecht Dürer prints: *Melancolia I; Knight, Death, and the Devil*; and *St. Jerome in his Study*.

Melencolia I, 1514. *Knight, Death, and the Devil,* 1513. *Saint Jerome in His Study,* 1514.

Another recurring figure in the text is a reproduction of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* at the home where Leverkühn rents a room:



Victoire de Samothrace, circa 1st-3rd century B.C.E.

Reproduction, *Nike — Winged Victory of Greek Isle of Samothrace,* 2017.

Finally, in the narrator's last encounter with Leverkühn, Zeitblom compares the composer to "a nobleman by El Greco."

El Greco, *Portrait of a Gentleman*, circa 1586.

El Greco, *The Nobleman with his Hand on his Chest*, 1580.

El Greco, *Portrait of a Young Gentleman*, 1600-1605.

These five works wouldn't initially seem to have a lot in common: three prints, one reproduction of a sculpture, one original painting. The El Greco painting is particularly odd, as it is part of a category of paintings, though created by an individual artist, the individual works are subsumed into the group identity.

All of these visual references are unusual—though precise and recurrent, they lack the same razor specificity of the intertextual references of d'Annunzio and Proust. The dimension that these works share, however, is that they are not originals, but iterations. In his *Confessions*, Augustine of Hippo uses syllables from the hymn "*Deus Creator Omnium"* to demonstrate how spoken syllables mark the passage of time.[290] Dante builds upon Augustine's presentation of time in the *Commedia:* sound is the dimension that enacts iteration. It is the gaze that enables unity and obscures time. Though Mann draws heavily upon the *Commedia* throughout the novel, his use of visual and sound referents reverse Dante's practices. The iterations of his images problematize sequence rather than simultaneity. Conversely, Leverkühn's final performance rings out in a single chord, performing union.

There is one final set of references in *Doctor Faustus* to enter into this conversation, and it is one of the strangest: the figure of the mermaid. The first clear reference of this group is Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine.* However, the use of the mermaid is not a reference to a single work but to a cluster of artistic iterations, whose names change as the story travels across cultures and media. The mermaid appears sparingly, but at moments of particular importance in the narrative, including Leverkühn's confession.

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[290] Augustine, *Confessions*, 241.

> I was in recompense to suffer knifelike pains within that time, much like those the little mermaid suffered in her legs, who was my sister and sweet bride, Hyphialta by name. For He led her to my bed as my concubine, so that I commenced to woo her and grew in my love for her, whether she came with her fishy tail or with legs. Though oftener times she came in her tail, because of the very pains she suffered like knives in her legs outweighed her lust, and I had much liking for the pleasant mingling of her dainty body into the scaly tail. I took still higher delight, however, in her purely human shape, and so for my part my lust was greater when she visited me with legs.[291]

Notably, in the final confession, the references are not to Fouque's *Undine*, but to another telling, perhaps Andersen. Fouqué's *Undine* does not undergo the pangs of pain in her transformation into human because she arrives on scene in human form. Andersen's mermaid, however, does. The positioning of these two intertexts in the narrative matters—Fouqué's iteration of the myth, placed at the beginning of the novel, emphasizes responses of characters to events beyond their control. Andersen's mermaid, placed during Leverkühn's confession, is characterized by her agency—she chooses transformation. Andersen's mermaid tale is particularly useful for Mann as an intertextual, intermedial encounter because it emphasizes the dynamics of transformation, embodiment, soul, and sound (particularly, music) in its conclusion:

> The sun rose up from the waters. Its beams fell, warm and kindly, upon the chill sea foam, and the little mermaid did not feel the hand of death. In the bright sunlight overhead, she saw hundreds of fair ethereal beings. They were so transparent that through them she could see the ship's white sails and the red clouds in the sky. Their voices were sheer music, but so spirit-like that no human ear could detect the sound, just as no eye on earth could see their forms. Without wings, they floated as light as the air itself. The little mermaid discovered that she was shaped like them, and that she was gradually rising up out of the foam.
>
> "Who are you, toward whom I rise?" she asked, and her voice sounded like those above her, so spiritual that no music on earth could match it.

[291] Mann, *Doctor Faustus,* 524.

"We are the daughters of the air," they answered.

Andersen's telling of the mermaid legend is not unambiguously positive. The final liberation of the air spirits in his rendering involves a 300-year process necessitating good deeds and potential trials. But it also involves the celestial, blended realms of music—a music free from the concerns and constraints of humanity. Having descended into the abyss and achieved suspension through dissonance, perhaps Leverkühn rises as well.

Mann's appropriation of *Undine*, at last, holds one final resonant note. Cosima Wagner's last diary entry is February 12, 1883, the night before Wagner died.

> He reads *Undine,* of which he prefers the first part. When I am already lying in bed, I hear him talking volubly and loudly; I get up and go into his room. "I was talking to you," he says, and embraces me tenderly and long. "Once in 5,000 years it succeeds!" "I was talking about Undine, the being who longed for a soul." He goes to the piano, plays the mournful theme "*Rheingold, Rheingold,"* continues with "False and base all those who dwell up above." "Extraordinary that I saw this so clearly at that time!" — And as he is lying in bed, he says "I feel loving toward them, these subservient creatures of the deep, with all their yearning."
> *[Cosima Wagner's entries end here.*[292]

Earlier that night, his friend and frequent collaborator the artist and set designer Paul von Joukovsky drew his picture. Cosima inscribed it, "R. lesend 12 Febr, 1883." [293]

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[292] C. Wagner, *Diaries,* Volume 2, 1009-1010.

[293] Barth, *Wagner, A Documentary Study*, 143.

Wagner often read aloud to those gathered at his home. His final portrait freezes his performance of reading *Undine* in time.

Conclusion
Time becomes space

> Now I have finished my work, which nothing can ever destroy—
> not Jupiter's wrath, nor fire or sword, nor devouring time.
> That day which has power over nothing except this body of mine
> may come when it will and end the uncertain span of my life.
> But the finer part of myself shall sweep me into eternity,
> higher than all the stars. My name shall never be forgotten.
> Wherever the might of Rome extends in the lands she has conquered,
> the people shall read and recite my words. Throughout all ages,
> if poets have vision to prophesy truth, I shall live in my fame.
>
> -Ovid
> *Metamorphoses*[294]

Ovid completes his chronicle of the ages of gods and heroes in *Metamorphoses* with the shortest transformation of the epic: his own. Ovid asserts that, in documenting of all of the scope of history to end at the tip of his own pen, he transforms his own mortal body into the immortal form of the book, placing it in the Pantheon of greats he has chronicled. Staging one's own engagement with the gods and heroes of the past is a time-honored artistic marketing strategy. In November of 1840, Wagner published a short novel, *Eine Pilgerfahrt zu Beethoven*, in Paris' *Revue et gazette musicale*, in which he frames an imaginary encounter between a young musician, "R.," with his idol, Beethoven.[295] It was a fortuitous title: it did not take long after the founding of his theater at Bayreuth for the term "pilgrimage" to be used to depict the fervent intentions of those chasing Wagner's legacy. In 1891, Mark Twain wrote of his voyage to Bayreuth for the Chicago Daily Tribune:

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[294] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 636.

[295] First published in French translation as "Une visite à Beethoven, épisode de la vie d'un musician allemande," it was published in its German original in 1841 in Dresden's *Abend-Zeitung* along with another Wagner novella, *Ein Ende in Paris.* (Vazsonyi, "*Pilgerfahrt zu Beethoven*, *Eine,*" *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, 428.)

> It was at Nuremberg that we struck the inundation of music-mad strangers that was rolling down upon Bayreuth. It had been long since we had seen such multitudes of excited and struggling people. It took a good half-hour to pack them and pair them into the train—and it was the longest train we have yet seen in Europe. […] It gives one an impressive sense of the magnitude of this biennial pilgrimage. For a pilgrimage is what it is. The devotees come from the very ends of the earth to worship their prophet in his own Kaaba in his own Mecca.[296]

But if Twain's opening suggests that he might view this devotion with skepticism, he goes on to reveal that he, too, has been at least somewhat overtaken by the passion aroused by the experience of Wagner at Bayreuth:

> I saw the last act of "Tannhäuser." I sat in the gloom and the deep stillness, waiting—one minute, two minutes, I do not know exactly how long—then the soft music of the hidden orchestra began to breathe its rich, long sighs out from under the distant stage, and by and by the drop-curtain parted in the middle and was drawn softly aside, disclosing the twilighted wood and a wayside shrine, with a white-robed girl praying and a man standing near. Presently that noble chorus of men's voices was heard approaching, and from that moment until the closing of the curtain it was music, just music—music to make one drunk with pleasure, music to make one take scrip and staff and beg his way round the globe to hear it. [297]

Twain's heavy usage of religious imagery to describe the encounters Wagner at the Festival of Bayreuth was not out of step with Wagner's own self-promotion. He endorsed the glorification of art and the deification of artists—above all, himself—with remarkable vigor throughout his life. The sequel to his novella *Eine Pilgerfarht zu Beethoven*, entitled *Ein Ende in Paris*, contains the final confession of R., its musician protagonist, as he dies, impoverished, in Montmartre.

> I believe in God, Mozart, and Beethoven, and also in their disciples and apostles. I believe in the Holy Ghost and in the truth of the invisible Art. I believe that Art proceeds from God and lives in the hearts of all enlightened men. I believe that whoever has once reveled in the lofty enjoyments of this high Art will be her devotee forever and can never deny her. I believe that all can become blessed through Art, and that, therefore,

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[296] Twain, "Mark Twain at Bayreuth," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 December, 1891.

[297] Twain, "Mark Twain at Bayreuth," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 December, 1891.

> everybody should be permitted to die of starvation for her sake. […] I believe that the faithful disciples of this high art will be transfigured, clad in heavenly garments of sunny and scented melodies, and will be united with the divine source of all harmony forever and aye. May a merciful lot fall to me! Amen.[298]

The "invisible Art" to which R. refers in this passage is music. What is somewhat unclear here is what discipleship means: is it necessary to be a composer (as is R.) to be blessed through this art, or can one attain transfiguration simply through simply reveling in it as a civilian? This distinction is, in essence, is the defining node of this project. While Wagner's prose works underscore his interest in serving the *Volk,* the people at large, through his art, his audiences may only play the role of recipient vessels. They absorb the transformative sensory input Wagner offers, but most do not become creators themselves. This is an important component of what Nietzsche argues when he asserts that Wagner is "a disease," that he "has made music sick." [299] He characterizes decadence as a style in which, for its audience, "life no longer animates the whole. […] Everywhere paralysis, distress, and numbness, or hostility and chaos both striking one with ever increasing force the higher the forms of organization are into which one ascends. The whole no longer lives at all: it is composed, reckoned up, artificial, a fictitious thing." [300] Good music, healthy music, in Nietzsche's conception (he uses Georges Bizet's *Carmen* as his example) is music that "liberates the spirit," "gives wings to thought," and most importantly, that "makes [him] fertile."[301] This dissertation takes it as gospel that Wagner's music (along with his

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[298] Wagner, *An End in Paris*, quoted in the Publisher's Preface of *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven* (Weyer translation), vi. The publisher introduces the cited passage by noting that the house did not deem the sequel worthy of inclusion with its paired novella, but that the confession of faith quoted here is the single "beautiful passage" in a "ghastly" and "otherwise terrible" story.

[299] Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (Ludovici translation), 8.

[300] Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (Ludovici translation), 13.

[301] Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (Kaufmann translation), 158.

publications and his commodified life) can have an invigorating effect on other artists. The novels I have treated in this study serve as testaments to that fact. By juxtaposing rich sensory information with silent (yet vital) musical compositions in their narratives, they engage their readers in the creation of music (whether remembered or invented): they force the birth of new creations. If Wagner invites his audiences to worship him as the source of the invisible art, Wagnerian novels insist that their readers become creators of invisible art themselves.

Literary roots of total prose

All of the novels I have treated in this study are deeply concerned with the experience of the sublime and the metaphysical. Within their narratives, they follow Wagner's example in exploring the borders of this disembodied ideal through the representation of bodies in multimedia performance. Above all, they follow Wagner in their exploration of music as representing the vital and ineffable nature of humanity. Despite Wagner's self-congratulatory framing of the art of the future, his conception of ideal art was nonetheless one that engaged fully with both the present and past.[302] Before I conclude my arguments, I would also like to engage with the past, glancing first backwards in time to a vital point of contact not just for Wagner, but for d'Annunzio, Proust, and Mann: Dante Alighieri.

As I have noted in the previous chapters, both *Il Fuoco* and *Doctor Faustus* open with citations from Dante's *Divina Commedia*; these initial epigrams signal their use of the epic as a frequent point of reference throughout their narratives. A robust critical tradition explores the

[302] In *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works,* Lydia Goehr argues that, not only did the *Kunstwerk der Zukunft* engage with other time frames, but that it was "equally an artwork of both the present and the past." (Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works,* xxiii.)

links between both Dante and d'Annunzio and Dante and Mann. Though the *Recherche* does not begin with such an explicit point of reference, Dante's name appears five times across its volumes, beginning early in the first volume and ending with an appearance in the final volume. It also features a large number of more oblique references.[303] Each of these novels owes much to Dante. Beyond the shared dimensions of text citations, myth, time, and sensation, each of the novels I have explored also makes use of Dante's privileging of the female body as an instigator for artistic evolution, and each gestures toward the potential for transcendence offered by music, just as Dante's upper echelons of paradise increasingly incorporate song.

Dante was important for Wagner, as well. In addition to the Italian poet's general influence on Goethe's *Faust,* a lifelong point of reference for the composer, we know Wagner read Dante frequently. The *Commedia* was a part of Wagner's library during his formative years in Dresden (1841-1849) and Dante as a whole remained in Wagner's restricted canon of the most essential works of world literature at the end of his life.[304] [305] Dante is an especially useful triangulation point for this project because the variety of his practices as an artist forecasted Wagner's: both artists traded liberally in poetry, manifesto, criticism, autobiography, and supernatural epic. Dante was also extremely invested in modes of representing transformation,

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[303] Proust, *IV*, 1552. Though the *Recherche* makes fewer explicit references to Dante than the other novels, proportionally speaking, it is nonetheless the closest structurally to the *Commedia*, given its ringed formation—in its end is its beginning. With the exception of Richard Bales' *Proust and the Middle Ages*, this dynamic has long flown below the critical radar. A number of recent studies do take up the connections between Proust and Dante, including Julia Hartley's "Reading in Dante and Proust," and Jennifer Rushworth's *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust* and "Proust's Ruskinian Reveries on Dante and Florence." Like Dante's pilgrim, who ends his journey through the celestial realms at the physical point at which he began, having been transformed by the experience, at the end of the *Recherche*, Proust's narrator encounters a cobblestone, an iconic physical point from his past, which marks his transformation in time via his re-encounter with a memorable place. Proust and Dante offers fertile terrain for further study.

[304] Westernhagen, *Richard Wagners Dresdner Bibliothek 1842 bis 1849*, 59.

[305] Borchmeyer, "Reading," in *Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, 460.

whether it be the metamorphosis of characters, of literary techniques, of memory into book, or of book into memory.[306] Perhaps most importantly, Dante fused a variety of modes of writing into a single personal practice. He not only laid the groundwork for the interpretation of his own works in his *Vita Nova*, but he narrated their creation according to his own autobiography. Finally, he projected the innovative construction and content of his *Commedia* well before he published it. The final lines of the *Vita Nova* set a claim to his future innovation:

> Appresso questo sonetto apparve a me una mirabile visione, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei.
>
> E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, sì com'ella sae veracemente. Sì che, se piacere sarà di colui a cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita duri per alquanti anni, io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna.
>
> E poi piaccia a colui che è sire de la cortesia, che la mia anima se ne possa gire a vedere la gloria de la sua donna, cioè di quella benedetta Beatrice, la quale gloriosamente mira ne la faccia di colui *qui est per omnia secula benedictus*. [307]

Like Dante, Wagner inscribed himself in artistic history through criticism and commentary before he created the work that he projected would guarantee his artistic legacy. Like Dante, Wagner did not only evoke or build upon previous generations, but united classical inspiration, centuries of spiritual iconography, and innovative artistic practices into his works across time. In the *Commedia*, he inserted a pilgrim who shared his name and biography, still in possession of a body, into the realms of the shades and the blessed, where he encountered dead beings from notorious to illustrious. In book four of *Inferno*, the pilgrim's guide, Virgil, himself an icon,

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[306] He opens the *Vita Nova* with this image: "In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria dinanzi a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: *Incipit vita nova.*" (Alighieri, *Vita Nova*, 1.1)

[307] Alighieri, *Vita Nova,* 42.1-42.3.

points out Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan assembled in Limbo. The pilgrim is readily accepted into their company:

> Così vid'i' adunar la bella scola
> di quel segnor de l'altissimo canto
> che sovra li altri com'aquila vola.
> Da ch'ebber ragionato insieme alquanto,
> volsersi a me con salutevol cenno,
> e 'l mio maestro sorrise di tanto;
> e più d'onore ancora assai mi fenno,
> ch'e' sì mi fecer de la loro schiera,
> sì ch'io fui sesto tra cotanto senno.
> Così andammo infino a la lumera,
> parlando cose che 'l tacere è bello,
> sì com'era 'l parlar colà dov'era.[308]

Here Dante positions himself quite literally in the center the classical literary lineage. From Wagner's inscription of his own role in the German musical lineage, we might infer that he learned well from *il Sommo Poeta*. While Wagner at least pays lip service to making his artistic gifts accessible to the *Volk*, in Limbo, Dante sets his pilgrim (and himself) apart from his audience by withholding the contents of his conversation with the geniuses of bygone eras. Dante makes reference to silence frequently in the *Commedia* to represent the ineffable, and by the time his pilgrim reaches paradise, this narrative practice invites the reader to take part in co-creating a celestial vision alongside the author and his protagonist. Here in *Inferno*, however, this silence represents privileged information: its inclusion is an exclusionary tactic. This detail helps to answer a crucial question: if Dante's works are so influential for the novelists I treat, if Dante already offered a model for blending multimedia arts, cultural history, autobiography, and

[308] Alighieri, *I,* 4.79-4.105.

productive silence into a transformative narrative experience, did d'Annunzio, Proust, and Mann need Wagner at all? Couldn't they have just taken Dante on as their literary guide?

I submit that the answer is no. In the *Commedia*, Dante includes the reader in his metaphysical journey—his techniques of semiotic chiaroscuro provide the reader with both concrete structure to help orient her reading and significant gaps that engage her imagination. But while Wagner, d'Annunzio, Proust, and Mann all use music to represent the sublime dimensions of *human* experience, Dante's pilgrim's journey is explicitly *celestial*, and his use of music is increasingly important as he ascends toward the Empyrean. There are no songs in *Inferno*, only sounds (most often, unpleasant sounds). *Purgatorio* inaugurates the use of songs in the *Commedia;* the penitents sing frequently as part of their process of absolution. Dante embeds music in the narrative by quoting the first lines of psalms and hymns; the words, familiar to the readers of his era, denote both the text and the music that enlivens them. The first song to appear in the *Commedia* rings out in the second canto of *Purgatorio.* The pilgrim witnesses a boatful of new penitents arriving at the shores of the Mount of Purgatory, noting, "'*In exitu Isräel de Aegypto' /* cantavan tutti insieme ad una voce / con quanto di quel salmo è poscia scripto." [309] Sound and song gradually become more prominent as the pilgrim rises. In each instance of song, Dante manipulates the presentation of both markers of time (syllabification, rhythm, melody—an echo of Augustine's use of celestial voices to demarcate time) and markers of harmony (which represent unison, simultaneity, oneness—as in the "tutti insieme ad una voce" in the first song of the canticle). By *Paradiso*, God is responsible for the mystical and ineffable sounds of the

[309] Alighieri*, II*, 2.46-2.48. This canto also reminds the reader that the author's own poems were often set to music—the pilgrim encounters his friend Casella and notes that, in their encounter, Casella sang Dante's poem, "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona," "sì dolcemente, / che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona." (Alighieri*, II*, 2.112-2.114.)

harmony of the spheres.[310]

Viewed through the lens of Dante's use of sound in the *Commedia*, the final words of R.'s confession in *Ein Ende in Paris* take on a particularly specific meaning, "I believe that the faithful disciples of this high art will be transfigured, clad in heavenly garments of sunny and scented melodies, and will be united with the divine source of all harmony forever and aye." The melodies, which mark separation, are transfigured into garments, taking up space rather than time, whereas the attainment of harmony and unison mark the pilgrim's final destination. In Dante's *Paradiso*, the final harmonies of the Empyrean defy description: Dante uses human metaphors to express them, but unlike his use of light, another prominent sensory marker of the divine, the music of *Paradiso* is not available to the reader, nor is there any suggestion that the reader might be able to conjure it. Like the conversation of Dante and the "bella scola" of *Inferno* four, this information remains a mystery. By the final canto, *Paradiso* thirty-three, Dante relies increasingly on vision and light rather than sound to express union with the creator. His work with gaze throughout the epic has primed the reader to experience vision as a marker of simultaneity, whereas doing so with sound presents a greater challenge. In "'La dolce sinfonia' in *Paradiso*: Can mere mortals compose it?" Maria Ann Roglieri terms the music of Dante's *Paradiso* "extra-music," as it is "so beautiful and extraordinary that it is completely beyond anything that humans are used to hearing."[311] Roglieri opens her article by quoting Wagner, in a letter to Liszt, as he expresses his doubts on the viability of composing music for *Paradiso* for Liszt's 1856 work, *Eine Symphonie zu Dantes Divina Commedia.* In his advice, Wagner notes the

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[310] Alighieri*, III*, 1.76-1.78.

[311] Roglieri, "'La dolce sinfonia' in *Paradiso*: Can mere mortals compose it?", 66.

difficulty faced even by Beethoven in attempting to represent paradise in his *Ninth Symphony.*[312] As long as they are living, even geniuses remain human.

The crucial distinction between Dante and Wagner, then, is that Wagner's works represent the representable. Wagner's mythic and supernatural beings are fully filtered through the lens of human culture, and whatever religious overtones one might extrapolate from any of his works, they are, in the end, works that take as their central focus the embodied human experience. Dante's approach to Christian doctrine might be revolutionary or even blasphemous, but his ambition in the *Commedia* is to represent the divine. Wagner's concerns are, once again, more corporeal. This is a vital distinction for their respective audiences. Wagner's works and life represent the possibility of transcendence while fully embodied, without the aid of celestial advocates. Dante's pilgrim has Beatrice as a guide to the realms beyond the physical. For the authors who follow Wagner, Wagner is Beatrice, the mediating figure that makes it possible both to embark on a metaphysical journey and to create enduring human art from it.

The Wagnerian hymnal

If Wagner's aims are, in the end, less concretely spiritual than Dante's, his techniques are no less the beneficiary of ritual spiritual practices. Like the psalms of *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, which would have been recognizable to Dante's audience due to repeat exposure in religious practice, Wagner's musical motifs function by harnessing memory and repetition in service of revelation. A single opera, with its recurrent motifs presented in a short time span, functions as a microcosm for life, offering repeat exposure to a stimulus within the span of a few hours rather

[312] Roglieri, "'La dolce sinfonia' in *Paradiso*: Can mere mortals compose it?", 65.

than weeks, months, or years. Operas, particularly those that use motival construction, have the potential to manipulate the experience of time. Let us return to the opera house of the present to explore this dimension in greater detail.

Rings, redux

They're doing a *Ring* cycle at the Met,
Four operas in one week, for the first time
Since 1939. I went to that one.
Then war broke out, Flagstad flew home, tastes veered
To tuneful death and dudgeons. Next to Verdi,
Whose riddles I could whistle but not solve,
Wagner had been significance itself,
Great golden lengths of it, stitched with motifs,
A music in whose folds the mind, at twelve,
Came to its senses: Twin, Sword, Forest Bird,
Envy, Redemption through Love…But left unheard
These fifty years? A fire of answered prayers
Burned round that little pitcher with big ears
Who now wakes. Night. E-flat denotes the Rhine,
Where everything began. The world's life. Mine.
-James Merrill
"The *Ring* Cycle"[313]

Opera spectatorship in the twenty-first century is remarkable in the degree to which it is dominated by recursion. Given the expense inherent in mounting new productions and the limited range of works that are well known and thus more likely to sell tickets, companies tend to focus on a limited spectrum of the repertoire in their programming. For many theaters, the production of new works is often a luxury rather than an expectation. Consequently, the experience of opera attendance is often marked by repetition.

[313] Merrill, "The *Ring* Cycle," *Collected Poems, James Merrill,* 611.

What is the effect of this repeated exposure, for a viewer or listener? Like sports enthusiasts, dedicated operagoers may use memories of particularly excellent performances to bookmark other notable moments in life (relationships, jobs, deaths). The repeated viewing of operas thus becomes a way by which autobiographical time can be measured. What exactly is it that we seek out when we seek out a performance of an opera for the second, thirteenth, fortieth time? That insights might be revealed by a new interpretation? That a production might illuminate elements we hadn't yet considered or noticed? Is it the search for stimulation, that we might have a chance to relive a moment that once moved us? Perhaps it is the simultaneous experience of new and old, recognition and first encounter. Perhaps it is also the promise of future encounters.

Das Rheingold, the first of the four operas in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, opens with a 136-bar drone on E-Flat. As musical time passes, figurations arise above this drone, but the drone dominates the prelude, anchoring the first four minutes of fifteen hours of music. It is not my favorite of Wagner's preludes (like Twain, I am partial to *Tannhäuser*) or the one I find the most beautiful (*Tristan und Isolde*) or exciting (*Der Fliegende Holländer*). But what *Das Rheingold's* prelude achieves is far beyond musical. It is the sense of anticipation for a theatrical spectacle that will not conclude within a night—the extension of art beyond the confines of a normal concert evening.

Wagner's tendency to hypervalue his own operatic innovations means that it is often helpful to regard his prose proclamations with a measure of suspicion. However, there is indeed a prominent sense of communal endeavor in the opera house as the first moments of the *Ring* ring out, a sense that something monumental is starting. This sense is generated in part by Wagner's

clever elaboration of melody in the opera's opening passage. But the sense is also self-driven, it is one that an audience member can cultivate with repeat exposure. When the lights dim, I have the sense that something monumental is about to happen because I have sat (and stood) through the *Ring* before and I know what is coming over the next seven days, of which I will spend roughly twenty hours (including intermissions) at the theater. The Bayreuth Festspielhaus mounts productions of the full *Ring* cycle regularly, but among the other theaters in the world that have the resources to produce a full cycle, there is generally a gap of at least four years between production runs. Enthusiasts often travel to seek out viewing opportunities, meaning that beyond the significant commitment necessary to attend one performance, repeated attendance at cycles of the *Ring* is an endeavor marked in both time and space.[314]

The narrative arc of the *Ring* problematizes time: fifteen hours after its first appearance, the opening drone becomes the ending cadence. The golden ring is returned to the Rhinemaidens who guarded the gold, still in its organic form, in the first notes of *Das Rheingold*. The musical and dramatic structure of the tetralogy forms, like its titular object, a perfect circle. In traveling a circular path, one revisits points embedded in its trajectory over and over again. In the course of Wagner's cycle, Valhalla is built and reduced to ruins, yet as the closing bars return to the drone of the opening of the cycle, the audience waits for it to be built again anew. For Wagner's fans, it is built anew over and over again, in different locations, as their lives progress. The practice of attendance at Wagner's *Ring* thus encourages contemplation of the intersection of autobiography and art.

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[314] While many Wagner Society websites feature upcoming performances, one webpage dedicated exclusively to the *Ring* cycle, wagnersring.net, lists nine companies presenting complete cycles in the 2016-2017 opera season, alongside six companies presenting standalone works. The lead text offers a suggestion: "Start planning your next holiday now." ("Upcoming Ring Productions," *Wagner's Ring: A Ring of the Nibelung Resource.*)

At the most recent Metropolitan Opera staging of the cycle in 2013, the bicentennial of Wagner's birth, I saw a small boy in a blue suit leaving *Götterdämmerung*, surprisingly perky after the six hour show. I didn't want to intrude on his family outing, but another attendee on the stairs asked his father how old he was. He was four. It was his first cycle. Pregnant with my own son at the time, I wondered whether he'd be joining me at the upcoming cycle when he turned four, in 2017. The predictable four-year rhythms of *Ring* cycle fandom in New York City facilitate this type of offhand contemplation of the passage of time, much as United States presidential elections or Olympic games function as anchors in time for political buffs and sport enthusiasts.[315] The ability to use performances of Wagner to mark the self in time is an unforeseen result of the composer's fame two centuries after his birth. His compositional, theatrical, and autobiographical practices have left their mark. The writers who have transposed his legacy to text have left their mark as well—if Wagner's life and works gave d'Annunzio's the impetus to focus on multi-media fusion and amalgamation, Proust and Mann took up those tools and built a new foundation for prose in the twentieth century and beyond. Wagnerian novels will never replace Wagner—one needs Wagner's music to hear the texts' full scope of references. A wish expressed by the critic Teodor de Wyzewa in *La Revue Wagnérienne* of 1885 seems particularly apt in the contemplation of Wagner and the novel:

> We dream of a moment when the threefold objective of the Wagnerian work shall be realized: the ideal work, which he has outlined so fantastically and which shall be free of all decorative machinery, a complete psychological study and romance; the ideal theatre, not that of Bayreuth (the only one possible today), but the delightfully realistic theatre of

[315] As luck would have it, I didn't need to start thinking of this just yet—after the Met's massive rollout of the mechanical *Ring* production in 2010-2013, the next *Ring* production will take place in 2018.

> our imagination; finally the ideal public, capable of recreating this work, without any need of electrical or musical gadgetry, but merely by reading, and exerting the will.[316]

By seeding Wagner's works within their multisensory narratives, d'Annunzio, Proust, and Mann leave open the possibility of precisely this type of encounter. All of the authors prime their readers' imaginations by including precise references to existing artworks. In the sections that involve fictional music, where they leave space in their texts for projection, an attentive reader might hear their own idealized Wagner. This isn't what Wyzewa was suggesting, precisely: after all, the reader's experience will be charted by past exposure to filtered performance. Moreover, she might hear something else entirely in this space (in addition to or instead of Wagner). However, this technique poses an incredible corollary possibility: readers of Wagnerian novels might have an intimate encounter with their memories of Wagner or they might become like Wagner himself, creating their own soundscapes, compiled from their own life experiences. The Wagnerian novel surpasses Wagner's own contributions by offering the role of composer, of Wagner himself, to the *Volk.* In the midst of one of his most abhorrent antisemitic screeds, *Judaism and Music*, Wagner manages to makes the following point:

> The poet's greatness should be measured by what they leave unsaid, letting us breathe the thing unspeakable to ourselves in silence. It is musicians who bring this unspoken mystery to clarion tongue, and the impeccable form of their sounding silence is endless melody.[317]

Wagner's works for the theater don't always allow audiences the possibility of creation in the sounding silence. From the illusory austerity of the printed page, however, the authors who transform Wagner provide precisely this opportunity.

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[316] Wyzewa, "Descriptive Music," *Music in European Thought 1851-1912*, 249.

[317] Wagner, *Judaism and Music*, 338.

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